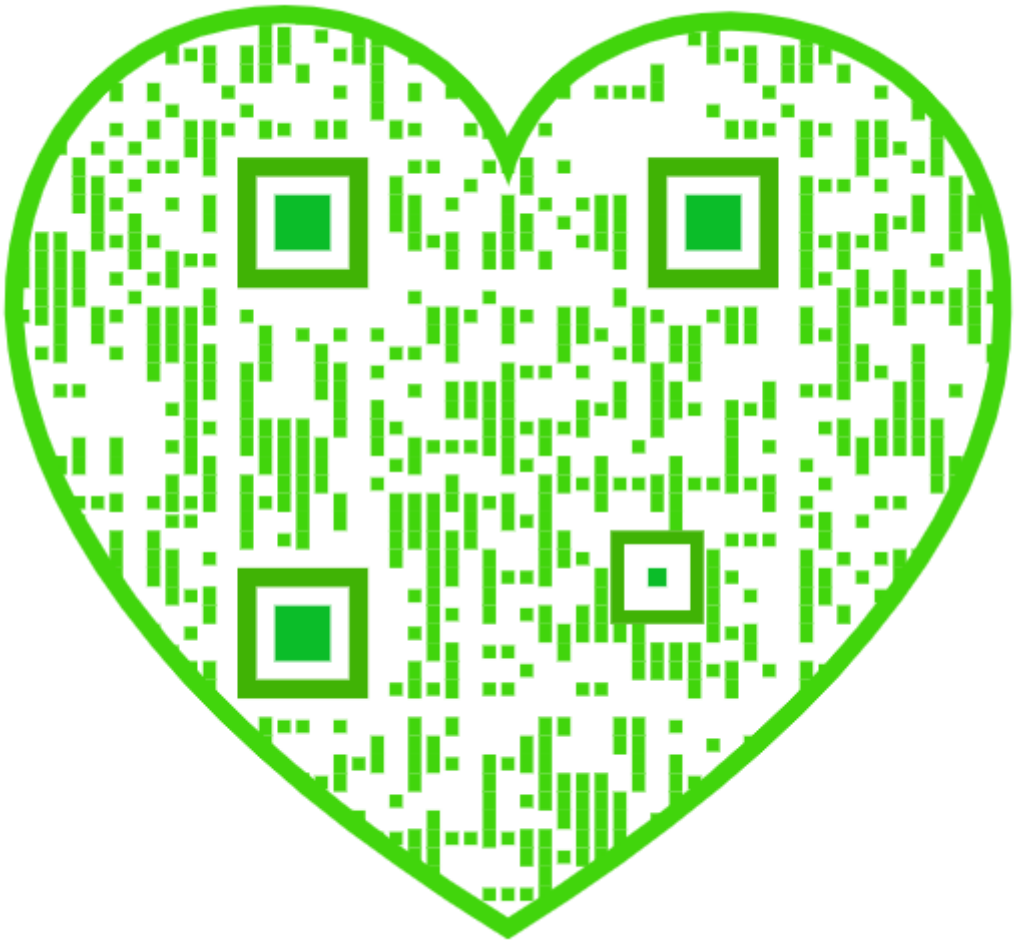

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PRACTICAL PARADOXES

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OR

TRUTH IN CONTRADICTIONS

BY

H. CLAY TRUMBULL

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PREFACE.

Lessons from one man's experiences and observations will not be of value to all. But lessons from any man's experiences and observations will be of value to some. No man stands, in his feelings and sympathies, for his entire race. But every man, in his sympathies and feelings, stands for a class.

Hence it is, that whatever truths have made a profound impression on a man in the progress of his life-course are likely to make a correspondent impression on others who are like him, if he can bring those truths with any vividness before them. And when a series of related truths have excited interest in their detached separateness, they will hardly fail to excite fresh interest in their exhibited relation to one another and to a common central truth.

The essays in this volume are an outcome of their writer's observings and experiencings in his varied life-course. They were received with interest as editorial contributions in the pages of The Sunday School Times, while appearing there, one by one, during a term of ten years or more; and their republication has been urged by many who desire them for preservation in a permanent form. They are now presented in a new light, in a logical order for the elucidation and emphasis of a truth which is common to them all.

The gaining of the thoughts of this volume has not been without cost to its writer. His hope is that the considering of them will not be without stimulus and profit to its readers.

H. C. T.

PHILADELPHIA,
August 14, 1889.

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I.

THE COMFORT OF CHRISTIAN PARADOXES.

The law of the Christian life is a paradox. It is made up of seeming contradictions. All its teachings are contrary to the common opinions of man. According to this law, giving is getting; scattering is gaining; holding is losing; having nothing is possessing all things; dying is living. It is he who is weak who is strong; it is he who defies danger who avoids it; it is he who loses his life who finds it. Self-interest is promoted by unselfishness; the pleasures of earth are surest to him who disregards them; happiness is found only when it is no longer sought; the clearest sight is of the invisible; things which are not, bring to naught things which are. Yet paradoxical as is the gospel rule of living, and hostile as are its teachings to

man's ordinary opinions, the propriety of its requirements and the absolute truth of its declarations are made plain to all who fairly test them in their personal experience.

A man acquires physical strength by putting forth his strength. The arm that would shrivel if unused, grows muscular and stalwart with much exercise. Money is made by its risking, not by its hoarding. Grain lives by dying. It springs up by being buried. The mind gains most by giving out, not by taking in. Telling a thing to another fixes it the firmer in one's own mind. Teaching is the chiefest help to learning. Struggling against danger is safer than shrinking from danger. A man overtaken on a plain by a blinding snow-storm would peril his life by crouching down in the hope of evading the pitiless blast, when he might save his life by rising up to trample under foot the snow as it falls.

So, also, in the higher sphere of moral action; it is by encountering evil, not by shunning it, that the Christian keeps himself

pure, and makes highest attainment in the divine life. It is by seeking the welfare of others that he best promotes his own welfare. It is by counting not his life dear, that his life becomes precious. It is by a spirit of absolute dependence that he rises to supremest independence.

A missionary is more likely to live a life of holy thought and purpose, while surrounded by heathen idolaters to whom he proclaims the truth, than is a hermit in a solitary cave, with no companionship but books of devotion, and no occupation but a selfish seeking of spiritual attainments. Going into the homes of the impenitent, that for their good he may be brought face to face with those who forget God, is surer to make real the great truth of salvation to a preacher or a teacher, than sitting down in his room to meditate on its preciousness, and to comfort himself with its hope. Not by flying from evil, but by fighting it, does the Christian keep himself free from the stain and the power of evil. By giving of his faith and

love to others does he gain in faith and love. Spiritual safety and spiritual progress are to be found in the thickest of spiritual dangers, and in the surmounting of spiritual obstacles.

"There are two ways of defending a castle," says Phillips Brooks, in holding up the example of the pattern life of Jesus: "one by shutting yourself in it, and guarding every loop-hole; the other by making it an open center of operations from which all the surrounding country may be subdued. Is not the last the truest safety? Jesus was never guarding himself, but always invading the lives of others with his holiness. . . . His life was like an open stream that keeps the sea from flowing up into it by the eager force with which it flows down into the sea. He was so anxious that the world should be saved that therein was his salvation from the world. He labored so to make the world pure that he never even had to try to be pure himself. . . . Some people seem to be here in the world just on their guard all the while, always so afraid of doing wrong that they never do

anything really right. They do not add to the world's moral force. . . . All merely negative purity has something of the taint of the impurity that it resists. The effort not to be frivolous is frivolous itself. The effort not to be selfish is very apt to be only another form of selfishness."

Being in earnest about something worth living for is the best cure for frivolousness. Doing for others what needs doing—at a personal sacrifice—is the surest way of overcoming selfishness. Striving to win the impure to a life of rectitude is a greater help to purity than the direct endeavor to crush out all unholy desires from one's own heart. There is no protection of self like forgetfulness of self in devotion to Christ, and in active efforts for the good of those whom Christ loves. Progress is never made more surely by the Christian than when, at the call of duty, he enters a path which is beset by obstacles and hindrances at every step.

These paradoxes are as true for our lives, in the present time, as they have been for

Christians generally in all the ages. What we give away wisely we shall still hold. What we seek to make sure will be most uncertain. In cheering the despondent we shall be cheered. In taking upon our shoulders the burdens of others, we shall find our own burdens lightened. In imparting spiritual knowledge to the ignorant we shall gain in spiritual knowledge. In moving against greatest spiritual obstacles at the call of God we shall make greatest spiritual progress. In seeking out the unholy that we may be the means of good to them, we shall be freest from danger of religious apathy. In disregarding our property, our position, our reputation, our usefulness, or our life, in comparison with duty, we shall be the gainer in all these things; our interests will be safer, our reputation higher, our usefulness greater, and our life better worth the saving. And this is the way by which we can get comfort out of Christian paradoxes.

II.

A PART IS GREATER THAN THE WHOLE.

It is an axiom in mathematics that "the whole is greater than a part;" but it is a fact in practical life that a part is greater than the whole. Indeed, Plato quotes this declaration as from Hesiod, and affirms its correctness. The poet and the philosopher are agreed concerning it, even though the mathematician may deny it.

None of us can love the whole human race as we can love some one person of that race; and our interest in the race as a whole commonly increases in proportion to our interest in its various portions. The grandeur and sublimity of the material heavens are never apprehended by any sweep of the eyes over the entire reach of the firmament, as by the search with the telescope into the starry

wonders of a single quarter of the heavens. We never have such an interest in knowledge in general as we have in some particular branch of knowledge; nor has any branch of knowledge any such hold upon us by its entirety as it has by its minor details, into which we have searched diligently.

As a practical force, the wedge has more power than a sphere. The thin edge of the axe or the jagged edge of the saw has greater efficiency than the polished surface of either. Modern science puts an explosive charge *into* the cannon-ball, as well as behind it, in order that the ball may burst and do greater execution by its fragments than it could as a complete and unbroken whole.

In all efforts to arouse men to duty or to convince men of truth, there is more power in a one-sided or a partial presentation of the case, than there could be in a well-balanced consideration of all that is by any possibility involved in the issue. Reformers have always been men of one idea; and their partiality of view has been an important element

of their power in bringing others to see the importance of what, to their minds, was all-important. The earnest argument of the advocate is, ordinarily, more influential with the jury, than is the unimpassioned charge of the judge; and this even when the jury seeks to give a righteous verdict, and gives it. The right side seems more clearly the right, when no opposing or qualifying considerations are before the mind.

A preacher, as a rule, has power, not in proportion to his fairness in stating both sides of every question touched by him, and to his habit of bringing out many truths at the same time in their due proportions and relations, but according to his earnestness in showing one truth at a time, and the best side of that. Any leader is a gainer in his leading-power when his zeal and enthusiasm see, and bring others to see, only one way in which to go, and that—the way he is going. This it is that makes a part greater than the whole as a plea for duty or for right.

The man who can see all sides of a subject

with like clearness and equal interest is no man to bring others to see the importance of any one phase of that subject, however he may, himself, enjoy his impartial and judicial apprehension of its merits. He is admirably fitted to give the casting vote, when all the world is a tie on that subject, and only a final decision is waited for; but so long as the see-saw of controversy continues, he neither goes up nor goes down with either end of the plank. His standing-place is over the pivotal log, with nothing to do beyond a slight kink of his knees—first one and then the other—to keep himself in equilibrium. His mission in the engine of the world's action is that of the balance-wheel, rather than of the piston. He is too well rounded a man to push his way through a crowd. There is no thin edge to him, by which he can force in where there is a jam. It is good to have such men in the world. They are good for judges, good as examples, good in their power for the future; but they are not good as reformers, as pioneers, as advocates, as leaders, for the

present hour. A really well-rounded man belongs—like every polished sphere—on the summit of a column, or elsewhere in the place of the finished and the ornamental. He may be a very good man, but he is not the man to *do* the most good, or to bring others to do it.

On the wrong side as well as on the right, a part is more effective than the whole. No lie is so damaging to any person or cause as a half-truth. A caricature has its force in the fact that its representation of the man is no more wholly false than it is wholly true. Its partial view is its whole power. Baseless slander is never to be dreaded like misrepresentation. The out and out false is harmless, in comparison with the half and half witnessing to one's spirit and speech and action, by an enemy. The partial is more potent of evil than the wholly false, as it is more potent of good than the whole truth.

Whatever is *incomplete* is of course but partial; and the incomplete has, always, more in it by its possibilities and its suggestions

than the finished has by its actualities. When the end is reached, or the desire attained, there is no longer room for noble desire or ennobled endeavor. The resistless conqueror of the world becomes the crying boy when there are no more worlds to conquer. His manhood is gone when the purpose of his manhood is realized. And so it is with all the completeness that this world can offer or can show.

As a rule, those whose work is best and longest in the world are those who are cut off with their work unfinished. What they did do was so full of suggestions and expectations of what they were to do, that their glorified memory remains an example and an inspiration beyond all that their completed work could have been. And so the part that they did is more than the whole that they could have done. It is the broken column, rather than the capped one, that marks the grave of him whose life is still a power in the world. The gain of the whole is often a loss of the power and the beauty of the par-

tial. In this sense it is that Paul says of our earthly and human "knowledge, it shall vanish away. For [now] we know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect [is complete] is come, that which is in part shall be done away." All the inspirations and all the hopes and all the strivings that grow out of the suggestions of the incomplete, are inevitably at an end when the complete is attained to. Hence it is that in this world the immediate power of the partial and the incomplete is greater than the power of the finished and the perfect.

In architecture, a pinnacle or a spire has teachings beyond those of a dome; for a dome is complete in itself, while the spire or the pinnacle points to something yet higher. This it is which makes Gothic architecture more uplifting and inspiriting than the Romanesque. St. Peter's is wonderfully impressive. To stand under its majestic dome, and to look upward and around upon its varied magnificences, awes one with a sense of grandeur and immensity. But the very symmetry and

finish of that place of holy beauty are so satisfying that the mind rests within their limits. Not so the graceful pointed arches and the towering clustered pillars of the choir and transepts of Westminster Abbey. They lift and carry one above themselves. They point beyond. The mind cannot be satisfied with the reach to which they have attained. There is impressiveness in St. Peter's. There is inspiration in Westminster Abbey. Even the old Romans when they would build a temple to all their gods, as in the Pantheon, left its dome open at the top, that its incompleteness might carry the thought of the up-looker to the heavens above the temple.

That which is true in architecture is true in the whole realm of mind and matter.

"Nothing resting in its own completeness
Can have worth or beauty; but alone
Because it leads and tends to further sweetness,
Fuller, higher, deeper, than its own."

III.

THE LITTLES ARE THE LARGER.

The littles have their place and part in making up the larger; everybody admits that. More than this, the littles are often in themselves the larger; not everybody realizes *that.* Not in one sphere alone, but in all spheres, this paradox is found to be a simple truth.

All great discoveries are made through observing the little things rather than the larger ones. It is the man who watches the swinging lamp, or the falling apple, or the flying kite, or the twitching muscles of the frog, or the convulsive lifting of the kettle-cover, or who pores in study over the lenses of the microscope, who brings to light new forces in nature, and new helps to toil, and to power, and to health. More has been learned concerning the material universe beyond our globe, by the examination of the

single rays of light from the distant orbs, under the scrutiny of the spectroscope, than by all the survey of the vast orbs themselves in the limitless sweep of the telescope. And the great scholar in any sphere always shows his greatness rather in his new uplifting of an overlooked little in his realm of research, than in his setting in a new light the great truths which even an untrained eye could see, and an unskilled mind could perceive the meaning of.

Old soldiers have no such fear of heavy artillery as of light infantry, in the hour of action. They do not dread the ponderous round shot, or the shrieking Parrott shell, as they do the hissing bullet that pierces the air, and the tissues of life, like a flying needle. It is said that the cost of the fences in America is greater in the aggregate than the cost of the buildings. It is certainly the case that the smaller items exceed in amount the larger ones in every man's cash account. And when it comes to the troubles and worries of life, who will say that it is the great

things rather than the little ones which make up his daily burden, and that cost him his keenest heart-pangs?

Many a man who could nerve himself up to bear the amputation of a limb, or who could move forward unflinchingly into the thick of battle, shrinks like a child from the thought of having a tooth pulled, or an inflamed finger lanced. The very smallness of the demand for courage stands as a barrier to heroism. As there are poisons which kill surely in small doses, but which work their own cure in larger portions, so there are many trials and causes of suffering which are overpowering and deadly in proportion to their seeming insignificance. Those who could bear great griefs courageously, and who could grandly meet great emergencies, are powerless in the presence of discomforts and annoyances which are large enough to be a reality, but too small to create a demand on all the energies of mind and heart.

And because the littles are the larger, it behooves us to look well to the littles in our

dealings with others, and in our being and our doing before God. It is by our littles that we have power for good or for ill among our fellows; it is by our littles that our character is both shaped and shown; and it is by our littles that we are to be finally and fairly judged of God.

It is by the little word or deed of loving kindness and loving sympathy that we make other hearts glad, and that we win the love and gratitude of others. And it is by the little word of thoughtless or deliberate unkindness or severity that we give pain to others, and that we leave sad or bitter memories of our unlovely course in the minds of those whose love and respect we might have won and held. It is often true that—

> "A clouded face
> Strikes deeper than an angry blow."

It requires constant watchfulness to guard our littles in speech and conduct. It is harder to be always right in little things, than to be always right in great things. It

is easier to show littleness in the doing or the attempting of great things, than it is to show greatness in the doing or attempting of little things. But both these things are possible; and both of them are sure to be recognized, and to have their potency, whenever and wherever they are manifested.

We judge our fellows, we are judged of others, and God judges us, by little things rather than by those that are obviously great things. It is the unconscious, the instinctive, and the impulsive word and act of those whom we observe, rather than their more deliberate and formal expressions of self, by which we shape our estimate of them. And in the same way we are judged by the world about us. It is more important for us, in fact, to have a care to our course in the minor affairs of every-day life than in the greater matters and on the chief occasions, when everybody knows that we are on our guard and are at our best.

When the Lord chose men for Gideon's army, he judged them by the way in which

they performed so simple an act as drinking from a spring. In our Lord's parable, it was the man who had taken care of one pound faithfully, to whom his master gave the rule of ten cities. God is judging every one of us just now by the manner in which we do our simplest tasks. And his rule of judging is of universal application: "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much."

IV.

ONE AND ONE ARE MORE THAN TWO.

Even in cold hard mathematics, a unit gives or gains added power beyond its intrinsic value by its position with reference to another unit. One and one put together become not two, but eleven. And if it be the fact that in the realm of this exact science a unit tenfolds the value of another unit, and adds its own value to it besides, simply by its juxtaposition with that other unit, who will question that, in the sphere of being and doing, one person and one person brought into right relations to each other are more by far than two persons; or that their aggregate power is more than doubled?

"Two are better than one," says the Preacher; and then he gives as a reason for this gain: "For if they fall, the one will

lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up." There certainly can be no question that one live man and another live man are worth at least eleven times the practical value of one dead man. And it is obvious that the life of either of two men may depend on the helping hand of another man in the hour of peculiar need. Moreover, while they live, and are not in special danger, two men may gain tenfold power from one another by means of the sympathy and counsel and life-quickening assistance which they render each to the other.

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend," says the Wise Man, concerning friendship. An iron instrument sharpened is fully ten times as effective for its instrumental purposes as it could be with a dulled edge; and since no iron instrument can sharpen itself all by itself, one iron instrument and another iron instrument, sharpening one another by their clashing and mutual rubbings, tenfold each

other's value through being together. And as it is with iron and iron, so it is with friend and friend.

It is hard to stand all by one's self, battling a host without a human fellow to speak a word of stimulus or cheer. Not every man is capable of being an Athanasius, to go against the whole world when the whole world goes against God. But when one true man finds another true man by his side, the two may be a host in themselves; they may, in fact, be all the world to each other. Each is no longer one, nor are the two merely two. Each is more than one, and the two are many times more than two. This thought it is that gives point to the inspired suggestion, that in the Lord's service, in battling with the world, "one" believer shall "chase a thousand, and two" shall "put ten thousand to flight;" two having tenfold the power of one.

This truth is not a mere sentiment; it has a practical basis in the necessities of the case. No man can be at his own best, all by himself. He needs the stimulus and the cheer

of another to bring his own best into action. His powers can be at their full only in and through their expression; and they can have expression only when expression to another is called for.

Take, for example, a physician with the case of a very sick patient to tax his sense of responsibility. He is doing as well as he knows how, when the friends of the patient desire him to call in another physician in consultation. At once a new pressure is brought to bear upon him. He must be ready to state the case of his patient to his brother practitioner, with a sense of professional responsibility in that statement. His powers of observation are quickened accordingly. He scrutinizes the case with keener perceptions than before. He is more of a physician, through this added pressure, than would be possible without such pressure. The one is already more than one. A similar process goes on in the mind of the practitioner called in from without. His powers also are aroused by the appeal to his profes-

sional skill, and to his professional responsibility. He is more of a physician for this case, under this peculiar pressure, than he could be for the same case if it were left to him alone.

Then the two physicians, who are already more than two, test each other, and examine their common charge together. Every effort that either makes to state the facts as he sees them, or to formulate his opinion as that opinion must be formulated, enlarges his capabilities as a physician in charge of the case. Meanwhile each fresh suggestion made by either is a quickener to the thought of the other. There is no longer one standpoint of observation for both, but there are two standpoints of observation for each. Either becomes more than twice the man he was before, and the two together are more than twice two. Where either might have failed by himself, the two may prove a success.

And as it is with the physician, so it is with the lawyer; so, indeed, it is with every

thinker or doer in his realm of thought or of action: one and one may be many times more than two. No man can study to so good advantage all by himself, as with the help of another. In elementary branches, a man studies best with the help of a teacher; but if it be that he is above needing a teacher's help, he still has need of a fellow-student, or of a pupil. He needs another to whom he can express himself, in order to secure the gain of expression. By himself, he can never be more than a unit. With another, he and his fellow can be more than two units. This it is that makes the best Sunday-school teachers value most the Sunday-school teachers'-meeting; and that makes those who attend the teachers'-meeting the best teachers; for one and one are more than two—in a teachers'-meeting as elsewhere.

Independence of character, and independence of thought, and independence of action, are admirable and praiseworthy attainments; but no man can be independent without another man to help him. It takes at least

two to enable one to be independent. A man can shut himself up within himself all by himself; but in order to express himself, he must have some one to express himself to; and unless a man gives expression to himself, one part of his nature, and the most important part at that, is not brought into play. There must be both centrifugal and centripetal forces at work to enable an orb to keep moving on in its own circuit, in the mental or in the moral, as well as in the natural world; and only as a man opens himself outward toward an object of attraction, while still holding himself in toward his own truest inner self, can he be his best self, or be himself at his best. Thus it is that, in order for a man to be at his fullest power, he must have another person with whom he stands in such relations that himself and the other are as eleven, rather than as two.

And so we find that we are dependent on others to enable us to be ourselves, and that others are dependent on us in order to be themselves. Others need us, and we need

others. Each one of us is only one, but one and one in right relations make ten and one; each one being, in that association, tenfolded without the loss of its unit power. Here, as elsewhere, out-giving is in-taking; and he who is one with another is more than one in himself.

V.

THE NEWER IS THE OLDER.

New and Old are terms which are continually being confused or interchanged. That which one man calls "new," another man calls "old;" and again the same man calls the same thing both "new" and "old." As a result of this confusion in the use of the terms "new" and "old," there comes a confusion of the ideas which these terms are intended to convey, until it may truly be said that that which we commonly call the old is really the new, while that which we call the newer is the older.

It is not even a new thing to say that the newer is the older. When Tennyson suggests that each new century is older than the one which went before it;

> "For we are Ancients of the earth
> And in the morning of the times;"

he simply reiterates the declaration of Lord Bacon, that "*these* times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient, *ordine retrogrado*, by a computation backward from ourselves;" and Bacon in turn only rephrased the truth, which had long before been recognized, and which has many times since been re-emphasized, "that the later times are more aged than the earlier;" that, in fact, there never was a time when the world was as old as it is to-day, and that every dweller in the world is older to-day than ever before.

Three thousand years ago it was affirmed by inspiration, "There is no new thing under the sun," and in defense of this proposition it was declared: "Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time which was before us." And all the progress of knowledge in the growing centuries since the days of Solomon has gone to prove anew this truth which stood out so prominently when the world was three thousand years younger than in

these older times. Most of the new science and the new theology and the new inventions of to-day are but revivals, in this older time, of that which was known in the newer ages, and forgotten as the times grew old:

"For out of the old fieldes, as men saithe
Cometh al this new corne fro to yere to yere;
And out of old bookes, in good faithe,
Cometh all this new science that men lere."

But *this* is only a proof of our *mistaking* the old and forgotten for that which is new. It is not an illustration of the greater error of speaking of times and seasons as the new, when they are obviously the older.

When we number our own years, we speak of the earlier ones as our younger years, and of the later ones as our older years; and we recognize the fact that old age is before us, not behind us; that we are moving toward it, not away from it. But when we speak of the "new year" in the progress of time, we really mean a year that is older than its predecessors; a year that will find us older than

ever before, and that will make us still older and older with its every passing hour. And this contradiction in the use of the terms "old" and "new," as applied to the years in our history and in the world's history, has its bewildering and its misleading influence on our thoughts, and through our thoughts on our conduct, and ultimately, through thought and conduct, on our characters.

Who can doubt, for instance, that we should have other thoughts, and be incited to different conduct, and even be helped toward another character, if we were always, in the holiday season, to speak to each other of the hastening close of the new year, and the coming dawn of an older year? What a contrast would come from so simple a change as a more accurate phrasing of our holiday greetings: "A happy older year to you!" "Good-by to the newer year, and welcome to the older!"

> "Ring in the old, ring out the new,
> Ring happy bells across the snow;
> New year is going, let him go."

There would come to the mind a new sense of an old truth through such a greeting!

It may, indeed, be said, that each coming year in the world's history is new in the sense that it is entirely novel to us, and that this is understood in our use of the term "new" as applied to it. But the same might be said for the coming years in our personal history; for old age itself is quite novel to us all,—and it even comes upon us unexpectedly,—yet that does not justify us in calling old age new age. And our inconsistency in applying the terms "new" and "old" to our years, and to the world's years, has a practical bearing on our view of life, of life's duties and of life's opportunities, which is worthy of serious consideration by us all.

What we call the new year is not *new* in the sense in which we commonly speak of newness; on the contrary, it is *old* in the sense in which we commonly speak of advanced age. There is no freshness to ourselves in a new year, no new suppleness of body or mind, no youthful ease of planning

or doing. The first day of each "new" year finds us more fixed in habit, more rigid in fiber, more inflexible in every taste and purpose, and less liable to change, for the better or for the worse,—in fact older,—than we were on the last day of the "old" year. If we would but realize this truth, how we should hasten to accomplish the purposed good, or to begin the planned reforms in the rapidly passing new year, instead of postponing them, as so many of us incline to do, until the sure coming older year is fairly upon us. And it is because we mis-name the older year by calling it the new year, that we are so tempted to look upon the very worst time for reforms as the very best time.

But, it is often said, and it is yet more often thought, that even though our lives are not to be made *new* in the coming year, they may then at least be *renewed*, so that our old failures may be canceled and followed by our new successes. And this thought it is which so often gives hope in the looking away from a misspent youth to

a possibly-to-be-improved age, and which inclines us all to believe that the next year may be a better year to us, through its renewings, if not through its newness.

We must remember, however, that the renewal of our lives and characters comes not from the passing years, but comes, if at all, against the tendency and influence of those years; that it comes not from and of ourselves alone, but from a power outside of and above ourselves, and outside of and above all the sweep of the changing years. He who alone can say, "Behold, I make all things new," is "the same yesterday and to-day, and forever," and his "accepted time" of making changes for good in any heart is not the new year nor yet the old year, but the immediate "to-day"—which passes away with the declining sun.

It is both sin and folly for us to suppose that we are to gain any renewed life by renewed contact with the aging world; that we are to become in any sense new by our approach to an older year. *That*

was a Pagan fancy, but it is not a Christian fact.

In the ancient fable, the Libyan wrestler Antæus was said to gain new strength whenever his feet touched his mother-earth; but the earth is not the true mother of the Christian believer; it is the city of our God, the "Jerusalem that is above, . . . which is our mother;" and it is when we rise above the earth, not when we come back to it, it is when our heads and our hearts touch our mother-heaven, not when our feet touch the mother-earth, that we gain renewed strength, in our wrestling, for spiritual victory over the foes which so sorely beset us.

"Even the youths [in the newest year] shall faint and be weary, and the young men [who wait for a better time] shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

VI.

DISCLOSING IS CONCEALING.

There is no such thing as making a disclosure without thereby causing a concealment. To hold up one side to view, is to shut away the other side from view. The very sun itself throws one-half of our globe into shadow by shining as clearly as it can on all of the globe that is presented to it. And what can be clearer than sunlight?

It may even be said that God himself cannot make a revelation of his character, or of his truth, without making that revelation also a cause of concealment. His revelation of the spiritual and of the infinite must be made by material and finite agencies, in language which at the best is only suggestive, and which, indeed, limits the thoughts by its seeming definiteness. When God says that he has the love of a father, the tenderness of

a mother, and the unselfish fidelity of a friend, that wonderful revelation of his condescension and his sympathy brings light on his personality just far enough to indicate the measureless depths beyond—which cannot be revealed to mere man. The same revelation will reveal more to, and will conceal less from, one person than another; but, to all, its partial concealments are inevitable.

When, at the last visit of Jesus to the temple, his Father's voice sounded out from heaven in answer to his prayer, the larger number of those who stood by and heard the heavenly voice "said that it had thundered: others said, An angel hath spoken to him." Only he who was one with the Father comprehended the revelation which was to himself, and yet was for the sake of those who heard it. So it is with every disclosure of divine truth; the very words of revelation conceal so much even in their revealings, as to be a cause of ceaseless difference among those who learn from them according to their measure of ability of com-

prehension. So long as man is man, God's revealings to man—the revealings of God's works and of God's words—must be but the concealings of God.

"Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways:
And how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

The greater the light of disclosure, the surer the concealment of that which is beyond the light; for the very splendor of the light that we see is the dazzling cause of our inability to see aught save that light itself. Says George MacDonald, "There is a darkness that comes of effulgence; and the most veiling of all veils is the light. That for which the eye exists is light, but *through* light no human eye can pierce." Who would say that he could see most by looking directly at the sun itself? Who would dare think that he could look into the very face of God, and live? And because of this truth it is that God graciously conceals from us enough in all his disclosures of himself to enable us to

use our sight to advantage, by reason of the concealment which is made in his brightest disclosings to us.

Nor does man ever wholly reveal himself to his fellow-man. He has not the power of doing it even if he would. Rarely has he the purpose of so doing. If one should ask you to tell him what was in your thoughts, you might give him a partial answer; you would not lay your whole heart bare to him; and in most cases you would thank God that your questioner could not read you through and through. Your very answer would tend to the concealing of the thoughts kept back, by its giving larger prominence to those which were revealed. The light thrown on the truth told would but deepen the shadows over the truth concealed. And commonly this is in the *plan* of those who speak of their thoughts and feelings to others. They desire to conceal quite as much as they reveal. In this sense it is that so many have held that the true use of speech is for the concealing of our thoughts; a sentiment that

has been ascribed to Talleyrand, and that was certainly expressed by Voltaire and Goldsmith and Young, but which was modified by quaint old Dr. South after this fashion: "Speech was given to the ordinary sort of men whereby to communicate their mind; but to wise men, whereby to conceal it."

There is comfort in this thought, in view of all that we would conceal from others; but again it brings a certain sadness in its suggestion of our helplessness at revealing all of ourselves which we would make clear to those whom we love and trust, and with whom we are in closest sympathy. We cannot fully disclose ourselves to others even when we would. "All language by expressing some thoughts conceals many others. Much is repressed by every effort that we make towards expression. If we try to unbosom our hearts to each other, we hide as much as we reveal. We wrap ourselves round in mystery when we are most communicative."

At the best we cannot reveal our innermost

thoughts, or our truest selves, to another, by the imperfect medium of human speech. Tennyson says:

> "I sometimes hold it half a sin
> To put in words the grief I feel;
> For words, like nature, half reveal
> And half conceal the soul within."

And this is a truth concerning which we all have more or less of sad experiences, in our failures to communicate our noblest, our purest, and our tenderest emotions to those from whose spiritual gaze we have least shrinking. The very efforts we make to reveal our spirit and purposes and feelings, so often prove a concealing of that which we seek to disclose; because our words have one meaning to us, and another meaning to those who hear them. That which we would fain have made the voice of an angel, has seemed to them as the rumblings of the summer's thunder-cloud; least of all like a helpful word from heaven.

And if God cannot wholly reveal himself to us, or we to our fellows, how surely must

we fail in learning our fellows by their revealings of themselves in word or in act. That which, in one whom you now judge, is concealed by the very disclosure you perceive, may be that which would turn your prompted censure of him into admiring praise, if it could only be known to you. One's best as well as one's worst is often concealed in the process of attempted disclosure. In every case the freest disclosure of himself to you which now is possible to one of your fellow-beings, cannot but be a concealing of much which is essential to your fair judging of him, to your understanding of him as he is.

But while God cannot yet reveal himself to us without concealing far more than he reveals, and while we can neither fully disclose ourselves to our fellows, nor have our fellows fully disclosed to us, we can be, we are, disclosed wholly to God, without any concealment whatsoever. "There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

"Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" "*He* knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him." "He knoweth the secrets of the heart."

Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it. The thought of light without shadow is beyond our present comprehension, even while we know that it is a reality. The poet pictures it to us, when he says:—

"Far off—worlds off—in the Pleiades seven,
Is a Star of the stars—Alcyone;
The orb which moves never in all the heaven,
The center of all the sweet light we see.

"And there, thou shadow of Earth's pale seeming,
The wisest say, no shadow can be,
But perfect splendors, lucidly streaming,
And life and light at intensity."

The painter has given us another picture of it, yet nearer to the incommunicable truth. In Gerome's marvelously impressive repre-

sentation of The Repose in Egypt, out upon the darkness of the desert night-scene there glows and radiates a clear shining light from the very presence of the Holy Babe in the arms of the Virgin Mother, resting between the mammoth paws and under the overhanging massive face of the grim and gloomy sphinx. No shadow is possible there; no concealment, in the light of Him who is "the Light of the World," "Light of Light, very God of very God."

Even the inspired revelator can declare this truth only in suggestive and imperfect imagery, as *he* tells of that City of the redeemed—not in the far-off Alcyone, but in the presence of Him who was once that Holy Babe in the Land of Darkness: "And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. . . . And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light."

There, at last, shall concealment be impossible, and full disclosure be an accomplished reality. There shall we know and be known; know as we are known. But that perfect knowledge is not yet attained to. Disclosing has not yet ceased to be concealing; nor can disclosing be unlimited disclosure while we are still in the life that is.

VII.

FULNESS IS EMPTINESS.

A capitalist whose wealth is estimated at many millions is currently reported to have said that his surplus scores of millions are of minor account to him, inasmuch as any man ought to be satisfied when himself and his family are beyond the possibility of want. This conception of a desirable condition is one that would probably find acceptance with very many persons; yet it is based upon a fundamental error, and it is radically wrong in its practical bearings as well as in its underlying basis.

To be without want is to be without ambition, is to be without hope, is to be without the truest joy, is to be without the fullest life; it is to be empty in the saddest and most pitiable sense. There is, indeed, no conceivable emptiness like that of fulness, with

its absence of want. He, therefore, who is so full as to be beyond want, is not only the poorest of men, but he is a lost man with no possibility of redemption. Yet it is after this state of poverty, this hopelessly lost state, that a great majority of the human race is untiringly striving. And it is because of error at this point that the greatest of mistakes is made for the life that is, and for the life that is to come.

From the lowest plane to the highest, it is want that is the truest fulness; and fulness is emptiness. The veriest serpent of the dust loses its fascinating attractiveness when it lies prone and motionless, gorged with its fulness of devoured prey. Being, in its fulness, utterly beyond want, it is, for the time, without power, without beauty, without worth. Only while it is keenly alive with want, all its faculties alert, and all its powers on tension for the attaining of its desires, does the serpent show itself in the proud capabilities of its fatal seductiveness. Just in proportion as any animal life seems to be too full to want,

is it without efficiency and without admirableness. Just in proportion as that life manifestly outreaches with never-satisfied desires, does it show itself in commanding nobleness of nature and of mission. The contrast between the life of the oyster and the life of the forest-stalking king of beasts, is the contrast between the lack and the possession of ever-impelling want.

Man is never of so little worth in the ordinary pursuits of life, nor is he ever so spiritless and so lacking in true enjoyment, as in those tropical countries where he is measurably beyond the pressure of personal want for the supply of food and clothing and protecting habitations. Nor does man anywhere appear to such advantage, or attain to such practical efficiency, as in those more rugged regions where his every breath is one of want, and where life itself is a constant struggle to live. In the one case, his fulness is his emptiness; in the other, his want is the earnest of his fulness. And so it is always and everywhere.

It is a sense of want that keeps the world moving. It is a sense of want that makes life worth living. It is a sense of want that impels man to activity, and that makes activity itself a joy. It is a sense of want of exercise that makes motion a delight. It is a sense of want of nourishment that makes eating and drinking enjoyable. It is a sense of want of rest that makes sleep welcome. It is a sense of want of the means to supply want that makes toil a pleasure. It is a sense of want of knowledge that incites to study. It is a sense of want of position and power and achievement that arouses ambition, and that keeps ambition aroused. It is a sense of want of love that prompts to loving words and loving ways. It is a sense of want of larger usefulness that spurs to ever-enlarged and ever-increasing endeavor in every realm of good to others.

So soon as a sense of want ceases in any sphere, efficiency there ceases also, and enjoyment itself is there at an end. Because of its lack of want, fulness itself is always empty.

It is in the mistake of ignoring the blessedness of never-ceasing want to the human soul, that one of the principal religions of the world has its primal basis; and it is by the same mistake that many believers in the other religions are also led astray. The first three great truths of the religion of Booddha are: First, that suffering exists wherever there is life; second, that suffering is caused by desire, or want; third, that release from suffering depends on the suppression of desire or want by the suppression of consciousness, in that state of being which is designated as "Nirvāna."

Therefore it is that "Nirvāna," or the condition of existing without want, is the infinite jelly-fish heaven after which millions upon millions of human beings are restlessly striving. And it is because this soul-longing of the Booddhists so fully accords with the practical heart-yearnings of multitudes in our nominally Christian lands for a life without want, that Booddhism is many times held up before us in song and in story as a better

religion than that which represents unceasing want as the joy of earth and as the hope of Heaven.

As a matter of fact, the real choice, in this estimate of the worth of want, is between the view of the Christian and the view of the Booddhist; between heaven and nirvāna. The man who wishes for himself or for his family a condition of satisfied fulness has set his face toward nirvāna, and has turned his back upon heaven. For here and for hereafter his goal is the same. The state which he seeks he will never attain to, in this life or in the next; but meanwhile he will lose the state he has turned away from here. Such a man's longing is really for that condition of gorged unconsciousness which makes even a reptile unattractive and worthless; for in the emptiness of being too full to want, there is no distinction between the reptile and an archangel.

It is want, individual conscious want, ever-enlarging, ever out-reaching want, want in all the realm of all the faculties, want beyond

attainment or knowledge or conception, that makes heaven a possibility, that makes heaven a reality. Without want there is no heaven before us, in the life that now is; without want there can be no heaven in the life that is to come. Heaven without want is in itself nirvāna. There is no love in nirvāna; for love is full of want for others, even if devoid of want for self. So evident is this truth, that the Booddhist teachings warn against all earthly love as a source of want, and so a source of suffering. Heaven is full of love; and love, whether on earth or in heaven, is a state of longing. Heaven is, in fact, the cause of loving longing.

> "Longing is God's fresh heavenward will,
> With our poor earthward striving;
> We quench it, that we may be still
> Content with merely living."

Even when we give this longing its fitting play in love to Him who is the source and center of all truest love, its tireless, restful want goes on. The more it has, the more

it craves. The unceasing cry of the loving soul is:

"*More* love to thee, O Christ!
More love to thee!
Hear thou the prayer I make
On bended knee;
This is my earnest plea,—
More love, O Christ! to thee,
More love to thee!"

Wrongly directed want, or want without a possibility of its supply, would indeed be a curse to a man. If want were always toward that which is unholy or destructive, it would tend only to man's ruin. If want were ever toward that which was hopelessly beyond reach, it would be only wearisome and soul-vexing. But the truth then would be, not that there was want in the soul, but that the soul's want was not what it should be.

Not exemption from want, therefore, but the right direction of want, not the being beyond want, but the being in the way of finding a ceaseless supply for ceaseless want, is the true state to be desired for one's self

and for one's loved ones. Rightly directed want, want directed in the line of its God-given supplies, is the earnest and the joy of all intelligent personal conscious existence.

This it is that was the impelling want of the inspired Apostle. "Not that I have already obtained," he said, "or am already made perfect; but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

True living is a ceaseless wanting. Right living is a ceaseless wanting in a right direction. The noble soul, the loving soul, the aspiring soul, goes outward and onward and upward untiringly and forever. Its course is like that of the asymptotic line in mathematics, which ever approaches, but never touches, the limitless curve toward which it is tending.

Its joyous prompting as it hopefully climbs the summits which have no ending, is:

> "Cry, Faint not, climb! the summits slope
> Beyond the farthest flights of hope,
> Wrapt in dense cloud from base to cope."

And its never-failing want is its never-failing fulness.

Let us, then, thank God that we and ours are not beyond want, and that neither they nor we need ever be so empty as absolute fulness would make us. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," said our Lord to his loved ones; Blessed are the poverty-smitten, the souls which are not yet full;—"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"—not the abyss of nirvāna, but the kingdom of heaven. If we miss all other blessings, let us rejoice in this one—in the ceaseless fulness of ceaseless and rightly directed want.

VIII.

GIVING IS GETTING.

One of the plain paradoxes which is of widest application in the realms of mind and of matter, of nature and of grace, is, that true gain comes only through loss; that hoarding is impoverishing; that there is no way of keeping one's hold on a desired good like parting with it; that acquisition is a result of expenditure; that dividing is multiplying; that scattering is increasing; that spending is saving; that giving is getting. This paradox it is which our Lord Jesus enunciated when he declared "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" and which Paul had in mind, when he urged the remembrance of these words of our Lord.

The paradox which is thus affirmed in revelation, is confirmed in our every-day experience; and unless we realize its truth, and

act on it unvaryingly, we shall so far fail in securing and holding the truest material, mental, and moral treasures possible to us.

Bodily strength comes from its expenditure, not from its hoarding. Every wise use of a muscle adds to the power of that muscle. An arm carried in a sling for its preservation stiffens and withers. An arm which swings a great hammer takes on largeness and vigor with every generous sweep through the air. Keenness of sight and quickness of hearing come from the constant taxing of eye and ear, not from their shielding. An Arab of the desert can see and hear with ten times the acuteness and discrimination of a monk of the convent, because the one has kept in play those senses which the other has permitted to remain inactive. And when bodily strength or life seems failing, the truest way of its regaining is often by its increased outlay. A quick walk in the cold, bracing air of a winter's morning will warm the chilling blood for the whole day as no cowering over a blazing fire will do.

It is the use, not the possession, of any material treasure, that gives it its highest value. Merely to have it, bears no comparison in pleasurableness with its right employment. Food is absolutely worthless except for eating. The man who starves at the open door of his full larder, is even more of a sufferer than he who famishes without the sight of food. Well-filled library shelves are of no benefit to their owner, so long as the books there remain unopened. But the best volume on those shelves would have an added value to its user, if it were "read to pieces." Money gathered and kept for its own sake increases the discontent and cravings of its holder; while money sought and handled for its beneficent uses, gives pleasure and satisfaction to him who employs it.

As a rule, men and women of ample means shrink more from the outlay of money for their personal convenience and enjoyment, or for the giving of pleasure to others, and really have less of the delights which money-using might secure, than persons of more

limited income who have no desire for money as money; no wish to be rich, in comparison with the thought of living and doing richly. Straitened circumstances are quite likely to increase with growing accumulations of wealth; and unsatisfied cravings for riches are exaggerated by every effort at their satisfying. "There is"—indeed there is—"that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." And the pinch of poverty itself can never nip so sharply as the pinch of withholding-avarice.

Our mental faculties gain through their using, and have power in proportion to their expenditure. A good memory is a memory that is taxed heavily; and the heavier the burdens which are laid on it, the greater its capacity for burden-bearing. The imagination is cultivated by allowing it play, not by holding it in check. Giving out thought in speech or writing increases one's treasures of thought, as well as one's ease and power of expression. Indeed, it is only by giving out that one fairly gets anything, in the line of

mental furnishing. This it is that makes it impossible to gain knowledge while merely a passive recipient of instruction.

It is as though the cells of the mind had doors that opened only outward. An attempt to push them in, by a teacher who comes with information worth leaving there, may seem for the moment to be successful; but the next moment the rebounding doors fly back to their place again, sweeping away the stores which had been pressed against them. It is only when the mental doors are opened from within, by the asking of a question, or the re-statement of a received truth, or by some active outgiving of the intellectual faculties, that there is full access to the mind's treasure-house for its added furnishing. It is not until we have said a thing that we are sure of it; and by every fresh giving away of a thought we are getting a new hold on it.

In our moral and spiritual nature, the same principle prevails as in our bodily and mental natures. It is the using, not the having, of our powers, that makes them a source of en-

joyment to us. The more affection we lavish, the more affection we have remaining. Indeed, there is no such thing as affection except in outgoing; in giving. True affection is never selfish; it cannot be. Here is the difference between affection and desire; between loving and craving. As President Hopkins has said: "It is of the very nature of the affections that they give; and of the desires that they receive. The affections . . . are disinterested; they flow out from us; they give, and appropriate nothing. That is not affection which is not disinterested." The exercise of desire is belittling, contracting, deteriorating. The exercise of affection is ennobling, enlarging, exhilarating. Desire brings discomfort and unrest. Affection brings enjoyment and content. Hence it is that there is a delight and a blessing in giving, which there cannot be in receiving.

When a child receives gifts, or selfishly employs what has been given him, his *desires* are exercised, and by their very exercise they are strengthened and intensified. But when

the child gives to others, it is his *affections* which are exercised, and which are enlarged by their exercise. By the one course, he is narrowed and shut in on himself; by the other his heart is expanded, and made glad in its larger freedom and its greater play. As with the child, so with those of us of any age. Only as we give, do we get anything that is worth getting. Only in our giving, do we find the real pleasure of living. Our enjoyment in social life and in all our friendships hinges on our power to give help or happiness to others. Our success in such giving measures our delight in the intercourse. If we find that our affection, our ministry, our presence, is a source of comfort or pleasure, we recognize a blessing just there. But if we cannot give helpfully in that direction, nothing that we there receive can compensate for our failure to impart good gifts.

Our enjoyment in the truths and the duties and the privileges of the Christian life is made dependent, in the plan of God, on our

making use of them for others. It is in our praying and trusting for some one else, that we find the fullest gain of prayer and faith for ourselves. We get a new hold on every Bible promise or inspired word of cheer that we press on our needy fellows. It is only when our religious activities are in generous self-forgetfulness, that we experience their highest personal benefits.

"Is thy cruse of comfort wasting? Rise and share
it with another,
And through all the years of famine, it shall serve
thee and thy brother.

"Love divine will fill thy storehouse, or thy handful
still renew;
Scanty fare for one will often make a royal feast for
two;

"For the heart grows rich in giving; all its wealth
is living grain.
Seeds, which mildew in the garner, scattered, fill
with gold the plain."

IX.

NOT TWO SIDES TO EVERY QUESTION.

A popular notion that is as pernicious as it is common, is that there are two sides to every question, and that a person ought always to hear both sides, or to stop and consider both sides, before making up his mind as to the merits of the particular point in question. There is many a question which has but one side to it, first, or last, or at any time; and he who does not see, at the outset, that a wholly one-sided question which is brought before him is unworthy of examining before its answering, makes a mistake which is likely to hold him back from prompt and courageous action in an emergency, and which may even prove his ruin. Indeed, there are few more important lines of practical division in the sphere of one's personal

life than the line which separates questions which have only one side to them, from those questions which present two sides—to choose between.

Stating a proposition in the form of a question makes it logically possible to give an answer either affirmatively or negatively; but that does not necessarily make two sides to a question in the sense that it presents a case which calls for any deliberation or doubt as to the required answer. Raising a question in form is not raising a question in reality. If right and reason are both on one side of a given question, there is no other side that is worth considering; therefore it is that practically there are not two sides to every question; not two sides in the sense in which it is so commonly understood that there are two sides to every question.

Is darkness light? Is evil good? Is the false the same as the true? Is meanness as noble as magnanimity? These are fairly questions in form, but they are not fair questions in fact. No one of them has more than

one side to it. Right and reason are wholly on the negative side of every one of them. So, again, it is in many a formal question in the sphere of personal conduct. Is it not better to sacrifice one's honor than one's life? Is it not right to do evil in order to obtain good? May it not be allowable to yield to temptation, when the sin seems very small and the advantage seems very great?

Not one of these questions should be counted as an open one. Not one of them ought to be looked at as having two sides to it—worthy of examining. The question itself, in every instance, supplies its own answer. Hesitation of mind as to the fitness of that one answer—that answer and that answer only—is the hesitation which is itself a step in the direction of ruin: it is a show of that double-mindedness which makes a man unstable in all his ways. To admit that a wholly one-sided question of personal duty has two sides to it, is in itself a confession of one's failure in personal integrity of manhood. Singleness of mind in such a matter, as over against

double-mindedness, is a test of one's innermost character.

There are not two sides to the question, Is a lie ever justifiable? The one all-dividing line in the universe is the line between truth and falsehood. God himself is truth. He can neither lie nor justify a lie. If God were to lie, he would cease to be God. That which would be incompatible with the very nature of God, God could not justify in one of his creatures. There cannot, therefore, be two sides to the question whether that which God could not justify is ever justifiable.

It is not even necessary to admit that there are two sides to every question which may present itself concerning the conduct of another whom we are called to judge. If you know of a certainty that a man has been beating his wife, you have a right to say that his conduct was not that of a true man, or of a good husband. He may, indeed, say to you: "Don't think harshly of me, in view of the question which this raises in your mind. If you knew how 'aggravating' my wife

was, you'd count me a pattern of forbearance. You know, there are two sides to every question." But your response to that suggestion would be: "No matter what was your provocation. You had no right to beat your wife. There are no two sides to *that* question. Away with the thought that such a point should be deliberated!"

So, also, it ought to be when a man claims to have taken to drink in order to drown his sorrow; or to have embezzled funds committed to his care without a thought, on his part, of injuring anybody; or to have betrayed the confidence which a friend fairly reposed in him; and so in many another case. To admit that there are two sides to the question whether a sin is a sin, a wrong is a wrong, or a meanness is a meanness, is so far an injury to the moral tone of the community where such an admission is made; and every true man has a duty of insisting that there are not two sides to any question of that sort.

There are not two sides to the question whether we should continue unqualified trust

to one who is worthy of our sincerest friendship, even though others may question the wisdom of our friendship, or even though appearances may, for the time being, fail to give evidence of his trustworthiness. Whether we should give our sincerest friendship to this one or to that one may well be a question; but the friendship being given, the question whether that friend shall be trusted for what he is known to be, rather than for what he seems, or what others suppose him to be, is a question that has but one side to it. And as a basis of knowledge of a friend's real self, a loving heart is a surer foundation than a calculating head. To admit that there are two sides to the question whether a friend is to be trusted, is to put beyond question the fact that our friendship for him is not a reality.

Truest of all is it that there are not two sides to the question whether God should be trusted absolutely and unfailingly—in spite of appearances. Because he is God, and we are his creatures, his ways must often be beyond our comprehension. Because he is

God and we are the objects of his loving care, his dealings with us must all be wise and loving ways, whether we can now see them to be so or not. The reasons for God's action may often be in question. Their reasonableness can never be so. What though all these things seem against us? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Though he slay us, yet should we trust in him. The duty of a never-swerving confidence in God on our part is never fairly a question. The fact of such a faith on our part too often is a question.

When an anxious father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus, and cried out, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us," the answer of Jesus was, in substance, Whether I am able and ready to help you is a question that has but one side to it. Whether you can trust me to help you, is a question that has two sides to it. If *I* can, is not a question. If *you* can, is a question. "Straightway the father of the child cried out, and said, I believe; help

thou mine unbelief." Then there was only one side to either of those questions—as to the loving power of Jesus, or as to the loving faith of the needy petitioner.

Lord, help us all to know which questions have but one side to them, and not to count those questions as questions!

X.

CHOOSING WHILE NOT CHOOSING.

All of us have our longings for that which is still beyond our grasp. We are full of wishings and cravings; and oh, if we could but find a way of securing the objects of our heart's desire! Some of us long for health, others of us for wealth, yet others for love or for friendship, for honors, for reputation, for wisdom and learning. None of us have everything that we could wish for. Yet with all this similarity of unsatisfied craving among us, there are very different measures and standards in our expectations and purposes of the future, with regard to the possible attainment of our chief desires.

There are three ways of looking at life. We may take a fatalistic view of it, believing that what is to be will be, and that we cannot do better than school ourselves to a grim

resignation to the resistless and inevitable sweep of events. Again, we may confine ourselves to a selfly-practical view of life, and believe that our future is wholly dependent on our own exertions, so that, if we are to gain what we long for, it must be by our self-reliant and our self-persistent endeavors. Yet another view of life is that which sees in the control of all events the hand of a loving and an all-powerful Father, who wants his children to tell him freely of their wishings and cravings, and who will then decide for his children, according to his knowledge of their truest interests, all things concerned. This third view is the only really Christian view of life. What a pity that it is not the only view of life taken by Christians!

The call of God to his children is continually, "Ask what I shall give thee;" "Ask, and it shall be given you;" "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." And in response to this call of God, the true child of God is continually choosing, while not choosing—

choosing while he will not choose—in the matter of his heart longings, as he looks God-ward in prayer. He knows what he longs for, but he is not sure that he knows what is best for him; so, while his choice is naturally in the direction of his longings, he wants God to choose that which he himself would choose if he saw the case as God sees it. He chooses to take what he craves,—if God sees that it is best for him to have that object of his craving; but he is unwilling to make an absolute choice—however strong are his yearnings in a given direction—while God alone is competent to decide as to the real desirableness of the thing desired. And so the choices of the true-hearted Christian believer are ever by choosing while not choosing, as he makes known his requests unto God.

A gentleman who had consulted a skilled and trusted physician concerning his bodily health was told that there were in his system the seeds of a disease which would ultimately destroy his life, yet which might be battled

with successfully for years by careful and judicious treatment. At once that gentleman's attitude toward questions of diet and exercise and occupation was very different from before. And his conscious need of wise guidance from his physician was far greater.

Soon after that first disclosure of his real condition and danger, he sat down at a well-spread table in company with his physician-friend. Looking over the table, he saw more than one tempting dish, for a taste of which he had a longing, but he dared not choose for himself among the objects of his choice. He said to his physician: "Now, Doctor, I want you to decide for me just what I am to eat and drink. You know better than I do what is good for me. I want to follow your counsel, rather than my own longings." That was choosing while not choosing. It was not that the gentleman had no preferences of his own; he had very decided preferences; but it was that, back of his preferences for particular dishes before him, he had

a higher preference for his greater good, concerning which his physician's knowledge could be trusted as his own could not be. Therefore he would not choose for himself in matters of his own impulsive choosing.

A patient puts himself under a surgeon's care for professional examination and treatment. He says, to begin with: "I hope you won't hurt me, Doctor." The surgeon's answer is: "But what if I can't help you without hurting you?" "Oh! then you must hurt me; for I want to be helped, even if I have to be hurt in the helping." *There* is choosing while not choosing; choosing relief from pain, if relief be safe as well as practicable, but not choosing relief from pain if pain be a necessity, as a means to permanent cure. So, stage by stage, under the surgeon's treatment. The sharp knife of the surgeon causes the flesh to wince, and the patient's choice is, "No more of that;" yet that longing choice is in abeyance, if another stroke of the knife be the price of life and hope. Choosing while not choosing, all the

way along, when the choice is obviously of the weaker nature, and the alternative rests with one who knows and who loves beyond our own possible attainment of capability to judge for ourselves in the premises.

And if this be so in our trust of an earthly counselor, wherever our bodily health or our mortal life is involved, why should it not be the same in our trust of an all-wise and an all-loving Father, wherever our material as well as our spiritual interests are involved—beyond our limits of knowledge, even though not beyond our limits of longing? We wish for freedom from poverty; but what if poverty be best for us? We wish for full health; but what if sickness be to our advantage? We wish for love or friendship, for favor or renown; but what if desolateness and disfavor be the only state in which we can gain and grow in the likeness of God, and into the possibilities of his highest plans in our behalf? We wish for the prolonged life of one dearer to us than life; but what if God sees it to be better for that dear one, and for ourselves,

that death should now intervene between us and that one so dear? We wish for an end to this endless struggle of unsatisfied desire; but what if, in God's sight, our safety and our hope are dependent on our struggling unceasingly? Dare we choose as to these things, even though our human hearts *do* choose in them, each and all, continually? We choose while we do not choose. God knows the choice of our longing natures, and God knows also the choice of our heart of hearts, below our innermost human nature.

What an illustration of choosing while not choosing is given to us in that midnight prayer of our Lord in Gethsemane! "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And so again the second time and the third time—"the same words" of choosing while not choosing. "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

The whole life of many an intense and faith-filled child of God is a struggle between

choosing and not choosing. The entire human nature longs for that which seems to be, not only a possibility, but also a truly desirable attainment; while the consciously dependent soul, within, cries out to God to decide as he sees to be best, even in that for which the nature longs so earnestly. "*If* it be best," is the prayer; "and oh! *do let it be best.*" The heart-cry, with the reluctant faith-qualifying "if"! "My longing thou knowest, O Lord; that longing, I long for; but, but, thy will—not my will, but thy will—be done; since thy will is surely guided by a love and a knowledge beyond my own."

"Choose for us, Lord! nor let our weak preferring
Cheat our poor souls of good thou hast designed;
Choose for us, Lord! thy wisdom is unerring,
And we are fools and blind."

XI.

THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF.

It is often charged against the firm believer in God, and in the Bible as the Word of God, that such a belief involves a large measure of credulity. And there are many who pride themselves on their freedom from credulousness, as evidenced in their refusal to believe in the personality of God, or in any explicit revelation of God to man. Yet it is a simple matter of fact, that the beliefs which are held to-day by many scientific and critical scholars who refuse to accept the Bible as the direct result of Divine inspiration, and as the record of a revelation from God, involve a larger measure of credulity than would be necessary for the full acceptance of the Christian scheme—even on its face as a reasonable view of truth.

Modern science discloses a system and a

progression in the order of nature, which are every way consistent with the idea of an Infinite Mind as the source of all that is. Modern science fails to find the possibility of even the lowest conceivable form of animal life, save as the outcome of a prior form of animal life. Yet many a modern scientist believes that life itself, and the entire order of the universe, somehow came to be, and keeps on being, as the result of a primal senseless-wriggle, and of a spontaneous undirected movement of soulless matter. What credulity is shown in this belief, compared with that simple faith in God as the Author of life and as the Creator of the universe, which is exercised by him who accepts the Bible view of God and of the works of God!

Modern science shows that the one invariable distinction between the lowest type of mankind and the highest type of the inferior animals, is in man's capacity to conceive of spiritual existences as such, and to imagine the possibility of a revelation from the Great Unseen. Modern research shows that no

race of men has fallen so low, and that no race of men has risen so high, as to be without a belief in the existence of God, or of gods, or as to reject the thought of communication with the Divine. Yet there are scientists who believe that a man's glory as a reasonable being consists in his refusal to exercise the one capacity of his nature which distinguishes him from the brute; or who, again, believe that if there be a God he is somehow the Great Unknowable, incapable of revealing himself, or a knowledge of himself, to mankind.

Refusing to accept the Bible record of God's revelation of himself to primitive man, as fully accounting for the beliefs and the perversions of belief concerning God among the various races of mankind, such scientists endeavor to account for these universal conceptions of God, as a natural evolution of ideas from the customs of pre-human animal existence. Thus Herbert Spencer, one of the finest specimens of the scientific credulous unbeliever, actually suggests that

the ordinary salutations of mankind are developments of the customs of brutes. In an African tribe's habit of a man's throwing himself on his back and rolling from side to side, while slapping his thighs with his hands, Spencer finds a survival of a little dog's custom of throwing itself on its back with its legs in the air, when before a superior dog. And kissing as a social custom —as he views it—had its start in a dog's habit of licking one whom he liked. Was there ever such credulity as this, on the part of a believer in the Bible as a revelation from God?

Modern science has overturned the theories of former scientists as to the order of creation, and as to the history of the primitive human race; and it has approached more and more nearly to a complete verification of the record of that order and of that history in the early chapters of Genesis. Yet there are scientists and critics who actually believe that the origin of those chapters was in the wild fancies of primitive man's brain, and

that, without any revelation from God, or any guidance of Divine inspiration, that record, in its simplicity, in its comprehensiveness, and in its marvelous correctness, was so made up in the long-gone centuries, as to shine only the clearer and the brighter in the light of the fullest scientific research of to-day. To accept this theory of the origin of Genesis, requires a measure of credulity transcending any which has been charged upon the simplest-hearted believer in the infallibility of the text of that book.

Modern research finds, practically all the world over, a tradition of a departed golden day of man's primal purity, and a hope of an ultimate restoration of such a day. In ancient Egypt the serpent represents the embodiment of evil, and a struggle with that serpent is the chiefest work of the pre-eminent son of the gods. In India the thousand-headed serpent is a means of destroying the very world itself, at the close of each distinctive eon. In primitive North America, the serpent figures as a source of evil to all

who share its nature or who feel its power. And these are but specimens of a world-wide similarity of symbolism. The idea of a tree of life is, again, as nearly universal in the race as that of the evil-symbolizing serpent.

Accepting the Bible story of Eden, and the fall of man, and the promises of redemption, as an inspired record of truth,—whether the references to the serpent and the tree as such are understood as Divinely intended to be taken by the reader in exclusive literalness, or as fitting symbolisms of the truth,—all these perverted traditions of that primal truth are simple and natural. But there are scientists and critics who actually believe that primitive men everywhere—howsoever circumstanced or trained—happened to imagine almost precisely the same state of things, as to the beginning of evil in their race, with the employment of the same symbols of the serpent of evil and the tree of life. It requires wonderful credulity to be one of that class of unbelievers.

Modern research has brought to light the

so-called sacred books of the principal religions of the ages, and has laid them in comparison with the Bible as the Book of books. Not one of those books can be said, even by its warmest Christian admirers, to contain a single new truth; to be free from the teaching of gross error; to have a trustworthy historic value; or even to be composed in large part of other matter than puerile absurdities. The best that can be said of any one of them is, that it contains vestiges of primal truth. Yet there are both scientists and critics who speak of those books as if they had a similar origin to that Book which furnishes in itself the proofs of its Divine origin, and which in its substance commands the admiration of the loftiest human intellect, while its spiritual teachings satisfy the uttermost longings of the holiest human soul. The credulity which would put any one of the ethnic sacred books on a corresponding plane with the Bible is a marvel of marvels.

An unreasonable credulity is essential to an acceptance of the principal beliefs of the

unbelieving scientist and critic of to-day. A reasonable faith is all that is required of one who believes in God, and in the Bible as the Word of God. It is reasonable to believe that God is the Creator of all things. It is reasonable to believe that God, having created man with a capacity to conceive of his Maker, should make a revelation of himself to man. It is reasonable to believe that such a revelation of God, and of man's origin and destiny, as is found in the Bible as it stands, is the truth without any admixture of error. Credulity and faith stand over against each other for our choice.

Man by searching cannot find out God. God by revelation discloses himself to man. "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness [or the simplicity] of the preaching [or the heralding of God's revelation of himself] to save them that believe."

XII.

GENTLENESS AS A FORCE.

We are prone to think of gentleness as a negative rather than as a positive quality; as a passive quality which wins love, rather than as an active quality which commands submission. We are not accustomed to count gentleness among the potent forces of the universe. Yet, as a matter of fact, no force in all the universe has greater or more wide-reaching potency than gentleness. Gentleness is God's great power. Gentleness is the force of forces in material nature. Gentleness is a pre-eminent force in human character and in human action.

It was when the Lord would evidence his power for the encouragement of his disheartened prophet Elijah, at Horeb, that he emphasized the contrast between the force of violence and the force of gentleness in the

ordinary workings of his providence. "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a sound of gentle stillness" (for that is the literal rendering of the Hebrew, as given by our Revisers in the margin of the text). And then, as many a time since that day, a sense of God's reserved omnipotence came, in the "sound of gentle stillness" pervading that wilderness of mountain-sea; for it is a noteworthy fact that traveler after traveler through that desert realm of Horeb has testified to the awe-inspiring impressiveness of the peculiar silence of the mountain-fastnesses of Sinai:

> "A silence as if God in heaven were still,
> And meditating some new wonder."

"Thy gentleness hath made me great," says

David, in his recounting of the forces of God's providence; and this declaration of the power of Divine gentleness is the climax of David's recital of the forces of the universe, in the floods, the earthquakes, the hailstones, the coals of fire, the lightnings, and the whirlwind. Above these all comes the crowning force of gentleness.

"The gentleness of all the gods go with thee"

is Shakespeare's expression of a wish for power to another in meeting the adverse forces which must be encountered. Indeed, there is no force so god-like as the force of gentleness. Nor is any force so potent even in the visible world of nature. When the stoutest ships of oak or iron are helpless against the rush of the whirlwind and the lashing of the mountain waves, the gentle flow of oil upon the stormy waters will silently and surely crush into placid submissiveness the surface of the angry ocean; as if it were hushed to quiet by the all-potent sound of gentle stillness.

"A gentle hand may lead an elephant with a hair," says a Persian proverb, in illustration of the force of gentleness. And Shakespeare pictures the twofold power of gentleness in a scene in "As You Like It," where the Duke would first have resisted the sword-enforced appeal of the brave Orlando, but is won by Orlando's gentleness, and is prompted to say:

"What would you have? Your gentleness shall force
More than your force move me to gentleness."

Whereupon Orlando himself is subdued, and responds:

"Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you:
I thought that all things had been savage here;
And therefore I put on the countenance
Of stern commandment."

And his final suggestion of the force of gentleness is:

"Let gentleness my strong enforcement be:
In the which hope I blush, and hide my sword."

What, in fact, do we mean by a "gentle-

man," but a man who is *born* with superior powers, a man whose *gens*—whose birthright stock—places him above his base-born fellows? The very etymology of the word "gentle," as applied to a man (or to a woman as well; for, in the days of Chaucer and Spenser the term *gent* was pre-eminently the designation of a true woman's best womanliness), connects it with inborn genius and genuineness and generosity. Primarily a gentle-man is a man whose very nature is uplifted above the common standard of humanity, and who has superior force accordingly; even as Jesus himself has been designated:

> "The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

And this, although the term itself has often become so degraded, in the degradations of humanity:

> "The grand old name of gentleman
> Defamed by every charlatan,
> And soil'd with all ignoble use."

Even with all its *limitations* in the popular

conception of the term, "gentleness" has never acquired the taint of an evil report. While often improperly looked upon as expressive of a passive, if not indeed of a negative, virtue, it has never been counted an ignoble attribute.

Contrasting the two words "gentle" and "tame," Crabbe says: "In the moral application, *gentle* is always employed in the good, and *tame* in the bad, sense: a gentle spirit needs no control, it amalgamates freely [when it so chooses] with the will of another: a tame spirit is without any will of its own; it is alive to nothing but submission. . . . *Gentle* bespeaks something positively good; *tame* bespeaks the want of an essential good: the former is allied to the kind, the latter to the abject and mean, qualities—which naturally flow from the compression or destruction of energy and will in the agent." Gentleness is everywhere recognized as *consistent* with great strength and force of character, even though it be not always counted as an *evidence* of it—as in truth it might be.

Unless, indeed, a strong man has the power of gentleness—has it by nature or has it by acquisition—he falls short of the highest attainable force of character, whatever other attributes of power he possesses. Of course, there must first be the elements of real strength in the man, before the force of gentleness—or any other force—is a possibility to him. If there were nothing of the whirlwind, of the earthquake, or of the fire, in a man's composition, the sound of a stillness in his case might be the sound of a *tame* stillness, instead of the sound of a *gentle* stillness. Hence it follows that there is sometimes a force in a man of violence beyond the force of a man of negative quietness. But wherever the other attributes of power are in existence, the power of gentleness—the power of a gentle stillness—in the control of those attributes is the nearest possible approach to the force of omnipotence. In this sense it is that

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty;
And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

He who has whirlwind, earthquake, and fire, in his nature, and keeps them all in gentle control, is better than he who violently employs these agencies of power; and he who exhibits a strong spirit in unfailing gentleness is more of a man than he who can point to a city subjugated by his violence.

Gentleness always indicates, it certainly always suggests, a reserve of controlled powers. The unvarying gentleness, for example, of General Grant as a military commander, was a result of his marvelous self-control; and the fact that he never, even for a moment, allowed the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire of his composition to overmaster the sound of gentle stillness in his words, and in his manner of command, made him the force that he was over those even who might have been his equal in the power to capture a city.

It is a well-known fact that Wendell Phillips, as an orator, carried the art of gentleness in his oratory to such an extent that his gentleness of manner became the force of forces in his peerless control over an audience of those

who differed with him most radically in all the wild propositions he was bringing down upon them with the smoothness of oil-pouring on a stormy ocean. And so in every realm of conflict and of conquest:

> "Mightiest powers by deepest calms are fed;
> They sleep, how oft, in things that gentlest be."

It is not as a sign of her weakness, but as a token of her strength, that gentleness is recognized as a pre-eminent attribute of truest womanhood. It is in heartiest praise of his murdered daughter Cordelia that King Lear moans out:

> "Her voice was ever soft,
> Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman."

It is in assurance of her power of loving control that Longfellow sings of the model wife:

> "Sail forth into the sea of life,
> O gentle, loving, trusting wife,
> And safe from all adversity
> Upon the bosom of that sea
> Thy comings and thy goings be!
> For gentleness and love and trust
> Prevail o'er angry wave and gust."

Everywhere and always the surest proof of inborn nobleness in womanly nature is given in a gentle voice; and the highest attainment of womanly force is found and is exhibited in a gentle spirit and in unfailing gentleness of manners. Nor is gentleness the noblest attribute and attainment of *womanly* character alone; it is equally the crowning grace of the strong man's power. Only he who has strength of character can be gentle. Only in gentleness is true strength of character exhibited most forcefully. The gentleman is, in fact, the man who has a sense and a responsibility of power in all his words and deeds. He neither storms nor cringes; neither claims nor yields unduly; but he is gently quiet, and he is gently firm, at all times. He is ever one of those who can say in frank simplicity:

> "We are gentlemen
> That neither in our hearts, nor outward eyes,
> Envy the great, nor do the low despise;"

and he is also one who as "the Lord's ser-

vant," and as a servant of only the Lord, will "be gentle towards all," and so will be a force with and above all.

To be a born gentle-man or a born gentle-woman is something to be grateful for. To have the force of gentleness of spirit and gentleness of manner, by nature or by choice, is to be superior to commonplace humanity. But gentleness by birth or by training must be proven in present personal exhibit, and not by any family register of ancestral descent. If you *are* gentle, others will know it without your saying so. If you *lack* gentleness, you can never have the force to make others think that you possess it. Hence it should be your aim to *be* gentle, and so to prove your gentleness:

> "Nor stand so much on your gentility,
> Which is an airy, and mere borrowed thing
> From dead men's bones, and none of yours,—
> Except you make, or hold, it."

Gentleness requires power, shows power, is power. To have gentleness unfailingly is to be so far the possessor and the exhibitor

of that "wisdom that is from above" which "is first pure, then peaceable [peace-seeking], gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy." Some of us have wellnigh all other elements of power in excess of the matchless force of gentleness. Our lack of gentleness is so far a lack of grace.

XIII.

HAVING STRENGTH TO BE WEAK.

It takes more strength to be weak than to be strong; and the highest exercise of strength is to refrain from exercising strength. The lowest exhibit of great strength is the senseless show of strength in a brute. The grandest exhibit of strength the world has ever seen is the strength which was shown by the mighty Son of God when he humbled himself into the likeness of man, and became a helpless babe with a life of suffering and a death of shame before him. And no grander exhibit of strength was made in all that life of voluntary and triumphant weakness, than when the Strong One stood as one weak, oppressed and afflicted, opening not his mouth in complaint or rebuke, when the faintest whisper from those closed lips could have brought legions of angels for

his rescue and defense! According as we are willing to be weak at the call of God, and as we have strength to be weak when weakness is our duty, do we rise above the level of the brutes, and approach the spirit of Him whose strength was made perfect in weakness.

Even the very brute gains a glory that lifts it above the brutes when it has strength to overcome its strength; when it proves itself strong enough to become weak in obedience to a sentiment. The lion is more honored to-day in song and story for its willingness to be weak on an occasion than for its ability to be strong at all times. The lion showing itself gentle before Una as the very lamb which had followed her, is more kingly among beasts than the lion tearing his prey in pieces in the desert jungle.

It was more than a lion's strength that the lion showed when, instead of striking down the Roman slave who had invaded his lair, he exhibited the virtue of a trustful weakness by laying his paw in the hand of Androclus,

that a thorn might be extracted from it. And that same lion was stronger and grander than ever when, bounding out of his prison-cage into the Roman arena in the madness of his enforced hunger, the strength of his remembered gratitude was such that he bowed himself in weakness at the feet of the man who had befriended him, and who was now put before him as his victim. It would have been easier for the lion of Una, or the lion of Androclus, to have shown its native strength in the exercise of strength; but because those lions had strength enough to refuse to use their strength, they also are taken as types of the highest strength made perfect in weakness—whether, indeed, that strength be moral, or merely muscular.

Even in the realm of mechanical forces there is recognized the superiority of the power to employ weight and motion as though they were weak, rather than as though they were strong. The machinist points with pride to the fact that his mighty steam-hammer, which could crush a bar of

iron with a single blow, can be brought down so gently to its steel bed that it may rest on a child's finger without harming it. And if this be so in the sphere of mechanics, how much more in the sphere of mind and morals.

Two classic groups of ancient sculpture stand over against each other, as illustrating the superior strength of weakness—where an exhibit of strength except in weakness would be only hopeless folly. At Rome stands the struggling Laocoön; father and sons, in fruitless contortions, wasting their dying strength in vain contest with the encircling serpent-folds. Who ever looked into the tortured face of that resisting father with any thought of admiration or reverence? impossible though it be to view it without profoundest pity.

But in Florence is another group of parent and offspring facing death together, which brings a very different impression to the beholder. It is Niobe, the Theban queen, and her dying children. Who, having once seen that mother's face, can fail of reverent admiration for the strength there made perfect in

weakness? The sentence of death to her children has gone forth from the gods, and it is being put in execution before her sight. She makes no vain resistance in her agony. She is strong enough to be weak in such an hour. And the strength of her weakness in that unparalleled trial is the matchless charm of this latter group.

An art critic gives the lesson of Niobe proving her strength to be weak, as he tells the story simply:—"While with her right hand she presses her flying child to her with a mother's anguish, and bends lovingly over the shelterless one, she turns her proud head upward, and looks toward the avenging goddess with a glance in which deep agony and true nobleness of soul are wonderfully mingled; not to beseech her to have mercy (for she knows that she will find no sympathy); not to express defiance (for all defiance would be here but a sign of impotence); but to submit herself with heroic resignation—however she may be stricken with despair—to the inevitable. In this one figure lies an

atonement for all the terrible anguish that surrounds her. In her sublime bearing, in the true antique majesty with which she endures her fate, she raises us to that pure height of sympathy to which the tragedy of the ancients likewise carries us;"—and she teaches us anew how much stronger than the strongest strength is the patient weakness of endurance in its place.

It is harder to be weak than to be strong. It is harder to submit passively than to resist vigorously. The part of the struggling Laocoön is far easier than the part of the patiently enduring Niobe. Prometheus could joy in his wildest contests with the gods; but bound in helpless weakness on the rock, his cry must be:

> "Yet this curse
> Which strikes me now, I find it hard to brave
> In silence."

It is often harder to do an easy thing than a hard one, as others than Naaman have come to realize. The lesser thing is many a time the greater one.

"Many, if God should make them kings,
Might not disgrace the throne he gave.
How few who could as well fulfil
The holier office of a slave!

"I hold him great who, for love's sake,
Can *give* with generous, earnest will—
Yet he who *takes* for love's sweet sake,
I think I hold more generous still."

Who would say that it required less strength to lie unmoved under the thrusts of the surgeon's knife, than to resist its cuttings with the wrestlings of an athlete? Who does not see that it would be more of a triumph of strength for a child or a woman to rest passively in the grasp of a strong swimmer in the buffeting waves, than for the endangered one to double the danger by fruitless struggling? Who can doubt that the highest attainment of spiritual strength is shown in spiritual submissiveness? It is only when a soul is truly strong—

"Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through his eternal Son"—

that that soul can be restfully weak at the call

of God. Only then can its song of submissiveness be, in all sincerity:

"Pain's furnace-heat within me quivers,
God's breath upon the fire doth blow,
And all my heart in anguish shivers,
And trembles at the fiery glow;
And yet I whisper, 'As God will!'
And in his hottest fire hold still.

"He comes and lays my heart, all heated,
On the bare anvil, minded so
Into his own fair shape to beat it,
With his great hammer, blow on blow;
And yet I whisper, 'As God will!'
And at his heaviest blows hold still."

How much easier it would be for an enduring wife to speak out in protestation or reproach, when suffering under a brutal husband's injustice or neglect, than to repress all show of strength—even strength of deep feeling—and to bear in uncomplaining weakness the trials of her sad lot. Yet that strength, which the patient wife shows in her refusal to show her strength, is the power which finally brings many a husband's hard heart into soft-

ened subjection, and which in every instance gives a glow of glory to the strongly weak and saintly woman.

In the strongest man, the compressed lip and the pallid cheek, which tell of a determined purpose neither to strike nor to speak under the bitterest provocation, are signs of greater strength than could be exhibited in the biting tongue of his sarcasm, or in the arm uplifted for a merited castigation. Resenting an insult by a blow is the impulse of the ruder nature rather than of the finer; and the courage and strength to refrain from giving or accepting a challenge to deadly combat as a means of defending one's honor, are a result and a proof of progress in true Christian civilization, and away from the customs of barbarism.

It is in every-day life that we find the duty of being weak when we would like to be strong, and that we find how much more strength it takes to be weak than it takes to be strong. We must be quiet when we want to be active; we must be silent when we want to speak

out; we must just wait, and do nothing but wait, when it seems that unless we do something more than wait we shall die.

Daily and hourly the word of God comes to us anew: "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength;" and "In your patience possess ye your souls." Well for us it is when we have come to that strength of faith which enables us to say, each for himself: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong."

XIV.

HOLDING BACK AS A MEANS OF PROGRESS.

All stability and all advancement in the realm of matter are dependent on, if not an immediate result of, contending or of counteracting forces, or of contention or of counter-action in forces. Attraction and repulsion, pressure and resistance, pushing forward and holding back, keep the universe in equilibrium, and control the movements of the universe. There is, in fact, no material power which does not gain its efficiency through an opposing material power—even though the opposition may be from another phase of the force which evokes it.

"Resistance is the parent of light." Centrifugal force and centripetal force are over against each other in keeping the planets in their course. Even a uniform attraction like

that of gravitation, or a uniform pressure like that of the atmosphere, will work in opposite directions on the same body, in order to the preservation of the atoms of that body from the exclusive sway of the tendency to cohere or to disintegrate. Gravitation holds the walls of a building in their place, and, again, gravitation overturns those walls. Atmospheric pressure forms the bubble, and atmospheric pressure bursts it.

It is the constraint of the iron bounds of the cannon-chamber that gives the expanding powder its resistless force in hurling the mightiest projectile in seeming defiance of the forces of gravitation and of atmospheric pressure. It is the binding constraint of the boiler and the cylinder that gives to the struggling steam its power to whirl the ponderous locomotive and its following train over the face of the rail-ribbed country, or to push on the enormous vessel through sea and storm from shore to shore the world around. It is, indeed, only as a large measure of constraint or of resistance is secured, that a large meas-

ure of power of progress is made possible in any portion of the realm of matter.

As it is in the material world, so also in the mental and moral world. Resistance is essential to power; constraint is necessary as a means of progress. As a rule, man's success in subduing the forces of nature is greatest where the resistance is largest; and man shows himself the master of nature rather in the rugged and sterile regions of the earth than amid the abounding luxuriance of the tropics. So, also, it is the rule that the development of animal life is most rapid where its grade is lowest, and is greatest where its advancement is most gradual and tedious. The tiny moth comes to useless maturity and to death in a day. The kitten makes progress more slowly, and also more extensively. All the way along the scale of being the measure of intellectual attainment corresponds with the retarding of its maturity. Man, who is at the summit of animal creation, is in a state of helpless dependence for as many months as the calf or the colt is

days, or the chicken is hours. And the higher man rises in the scale of manhood, the longer is the period of his infancy and childhood; the child of the savage being capable of providing for himself at an age when the child of an advanced civilization must still be guarded and ministered to by nurses.

The truest preparation for high intellectual pursuits is in the disciplining of the intellectual faculties by an enforced constraint within the limits of special studies, against which the primary instincts and the passing fancies of the student's mind incline to rebel. Not until a student has learned how to give his whole being to application or to research contrary to his natural inclination, is a student capable of application or of research to the best advantage in the line of his inclination. And he who studies only what he likes to study, and only when he enjoys studying, can never make such progress in the direction of even such study, as can his fellow, of equal native capacity with himself, who turns, by his own will, or who is turned by a sense

of duty or of enforcing circumstances, in that direction after he has gained the power of working effectively against his impulses and preferences, and who, by holding all his intellectual powers in control, has gained the control of all his intellectual powers.

As a rule, the longer a man is in wise preparation for his special life work, the more effective he is in the prosecution of that work when he is fairly at it. He who leaves school early, or who refuses to take time for a college education when he might have it if he would, in order to gain an early start in some business pursuit, is likely, at the end of ten years or more, to be behind his competitor who held back from his start in that business long enough to be prepared by added education for more rapid progress when at length he was engaged in it. This principle it is that is the basis of the classic counsel, "Hasten slowly," and of the suggestion of the Qurân, "Haste is of the Devil," as well as of the later proverbs, "Wisely and slow," and "The more haste, the worse speed."

In every sphere of life this gain of holding back as a means of progress is continually showing itself. The man who is promptest to answer every question put to him without a moment for preliminary reflection; the man who is always readiest to speak in any deliberative assembly of which he is a member; the man who is ever freest to write on any subject of popular or of special interest; the man who invariably says all that he can say, or all that he thinks, on any occasion or in any presence; the man who is uniformly sure to act at once with his fullest energies in the direction of his mental prompting; the man who never holds in and who never holds back, in thought, in speech, or in action; the man of no reserve power and of no constraint of self;—such a man is never the one who does himself most credit, who makes greatest personal progress, who impresses himself most upon those about him, or who is surest to be a leader of his fellows in the line of true progress.

There is no pre-eminence in any sphere

without reserve power; there is no reserve power without constraint. He who expends all of his personal feeling in a word of command, of reproach, or of censure, has no such power in his utterance as he who manifestly speaks in that line under the pressure of an enforced constraint. He who is unable to control himself in any discussion until all that can be said on the other side has been heard and carefully weighed by him, can never sway his hearers as he might through such a wisely constrained delay in his speaking. He who hastens to bring out before the public the results of his thinking or of his researches, without taking time for their added accumulations, for their farther digesting, or for the fuller finish of their arranging, can never give a masterpiece of thought or of study to the world.

It requires character to hold back as a means of progress; to restrain one's impulses to speak, or to write, or to act hastily in an emergency. And character is developed by its exercise in personal constraint. It is often

a great deal easier to speak out than to refrain from speaking, to write at once than to delay writing, to press forward than to remain inactive; and then it is that the true man's character is tested, and that it triumphs in the testing.

XV.

THE DUTY OF REFUSING TO DO GOOD.

No man can do all the good there is to be done in this world. No warm-hearted, earnest lover of God and of his fellows can do all the good he would like to do in this world. No well-known, active, and efficient worker for God and for his fellows can do all the good he is asked to do in this world. Hence it is obvious that the most active and efficient and warm-hearted and earnest worker for God and for his fellows in this world, must choose among the good things which need doing, and which he is asked to do, and which he would like to do, deciding for himself what to do and what to leave undone; and it is equally clear that in deciding what good it is his duty to do, a man practically decides what good it is his duty to refuse to do, even

though he be urgently pressed to do it. Thus it is that the duty of refusing to do good comes into prominence as one of the positive duties in the life of every man who is doing his best in this world, and who would be glad to do more—if he had any right to do it.

In a village where there is but a single fire-engine, two calls for help in different directions may come at the same time. One of them comes from a house standing all by itself on the edge of the village; a house which, however, is all in all as a shelter and a possession to its occupants. The other is from a crowded factory building in the very heart of the village. The foreman of the one fire company may be compelled by his sense of duty to hasten with the only engine available to the village center, in view of the greater interests, public and private, there involved; and in so doing, he must of necessity refuse every piteous entreaty to do the good which it would seem he might do by going in the other direction. If the house on the village border is burned down, and its inmates are

left desolate, it is by no fault of the fire-company foreman, who refused to do the good which he had no right to do at the cost of neglecting plain duty elsewhere.

Similarly in the case of a coast-guard commander, with a single life-boat available, on the ocean shore, when two vessels in peril signal him for help; it may be his duty to refuse the summons of the one vessel while responding to the summons of the other, whatever are the consequences. So, again, it may be when a wife and mother's presence are needed by the bedside of her sick and dying husband, while a sick child calls for her loving ministry in another part of the house. She must choose between the two spheres of apparent good; and in deciding in favor of the one, she must decide against the other. These are extreme cases, it is true; but they illustrate the principle which is likewise operative where the duty of the hour is less obvious than here.

A city surgeon who by his professional skill has, as it were, the power of life and

death in behalf of his patients, may, while engaged in a critical operation, be urgently entreated to hasten elsewhere to the relief of a wounded man who needs immediate surgical assistance. The new summons is to a service which in itself is good; but, if he cannot turn from the operation before him without imperiling the life of its subject, that surgeon must refuse to do the good to which that summons invites him. Nor is that surgeon to blame if the death of the wounded man is a result of this refusal to attend him.

Every public man in the community is asked to give the countenance of his presence to more good undertakings than he could possibly participate in, without the neglect of his plain duty in the sphere to which his very honor is already pledged. He has to learn when and how to refuse to do much of the good he is asked to do. Every pastor and preacher is invited, and is expected, to do good in more directions than are really open to him, in the possibilities of time and strength and clear demands of personal duty as pastor

and preacher. Unless he learns to refuse resolutely to do much of the good which others think he might do, he will fail to do all of the good which he ought to do; as, indeed, many a pastor and preacher has thus failed, through trying to do the good outside of his proper sphere which he ought to have refused to attempt to do.

Every philanthropic business man, every large-hearted capitalist, every well-disposed and sensible citizen, is asked, day by day, to have a share in well-doing to an extent that would cripple him for efficient service in any one sphere of right endeavor, if he attempted a favorable response to even all of these appeals which he recognizes as in the direction of unmistakable good. He must decide what good to do, and what good to refuse to do, or he will do no good as he ought to do it. No man anywhere can begin his daily task in the morning, nor close his daily task in the evening, without practically refusing to give help in a hundred directions to those who are sick, who are sorrowing, who are

starving, who are oppressed, or who in some way are in bitter need at points where he could give them help if it were not his duty to do something else just then instead of doing good in that way. In fact, all the good that is done in this world is done at the cost of the doers' refusal to do some other good instead of that good. And so it ever must be.

The real question for every man to consider is not What good *can* I do? but What good *ought* I to do? The surgeon *could* prematurely leave the patient on whom he was operating, in response to a summons elsewhere; but he *ought not* to do so. So in the case of the foreman of the fire company, of the coast-guard commander, of the wife and mother watching and nursing,—what could be done is a possibility in two directions; what ought to be done is a possibility in only one direction. A capitalist could give all his money away at once to relieve the sufferers by an earthquake, or a pestilence, or a flood, or a conflagration; but that is no proof that he ought to do this. A pastor, or a business

man, could turn aside from the special interests committed to his charge, and spend all his time and strength in ministering to personal sufferers in other spheres than that which he has promised to fill; but it may be his duty not to do this, in spite of the possibility of its doing. The good which a man ought to do, he ought to do; and the good which a man ought not to do, he ought not to do—even if he can do it.

It shows no lack of warmth of heart, or of tender and generous sympathies, for a man to refuse to do the good which he could do, but which he ought not to do. It simply exhibits that trustful fidelity to duty which prompts a true soldier to obey the commands of his commander, regardless of any personal impulses or promptings of his own; moving forward steadily under fire in the face of every obstacle, when ordered to advance; and remaining inactive while the battle rages before and on either hand, when ordered to wait in reserve.

There was never a human heart so warm,

so tender, so loving, so generous, as the heart of Jesus Christ; yet Jesus Christ waited here on earth for thirty long years without lifting a hand in the line of the work which was waiting for him on every side, and which, to all appearance, he could have entered on. Even when he had begun that work, and all men sought for his healing power, Jesus could turn aside into a desert place to rest awhile, or he could go by himself into a mountain to pray, or he could lie down to sleep while there was suffering unrelieved within the possibility of his reach. He knew just what good he ought to do, and he did it all. He knew just what good he ought to leave unattempted, and he refused to attempt any portion of that.

When, again, he sent out his disciples on a special mission, Jesus enjoined them to refuse to do any good outside of that mission, even to the extent of stopping for a personal salutation—which means so much in the Oriental world. Similarly, in the present day, the disciple of Jesus ought not to be weary in the well-doing that he ought to

attempt, nor make haste to the attempting of good which it is not for him to be doing.

All along the Bible story the fact stands out that men of God were willing to refuse to do much of the good which seemed to press upon them for its doing, simply because God had, just then, something else for them to do, even though that doing, in their case, was—doing nothing. Moses could quietly tend sheep in Arabia, year after year, when work in the line of his life-mission appeared to call for his active labors in Egypt. Elijah and John the Baptist deliberately did nothing in the line of their work of reform until the time was ripe for its doing. And Saul of Tarsus could spend three years in Arabia when souls were famishing for lack of the bread of life which he was commissioned to bring to them—in God's good time. God had a quieter work for these servants of his than that to which mere human reason would have assigned them; but God knew what he wanted of them, and they did, or refused to do, accordingly.

If, indeed, it were not for the privilege of resting on the conviction that God is over all, and that every child of God has his own good work to do in this world, and all other good work to refuse to do, life would be a hopeless struggle, and death would be despair. But as it is, every child of God can be sure that he has the time and the strength and the ability to do all the good that it is really for him to do, in the plan of God; and that he is called to have the courage and the firmness and the faith to refuse to do any good that, in the plan of God, it is not for him to undertake. Nor will God's cause suffer, nor will men's truest welfare lack, through any failure or refusal of a child of God to do the good which he could do, but which, circumstanced as he is, he ought not to do.

God's plans never pivot on any man's work outside of that man's sphere of positive personal duty. Nor are any of God's plans limited for their finishing to any one man's fullest activities. Even when a true man's part in the world's work is finished, the work at which that

man toiled is not finished. It is given to no man to do all that he would like to do, nor to finish all that he attempts to do. Yet no work of God shall fail, nor be ultimately incomplete. The good which one man ought to refuse to do, another man ought to undertake; and the good which one man has rightly begun, another man shall rightly carry forward. "Herein is the saying true, One soweth and another reapeth;" and so God's work goes on. This is the thought which comforted the poet E. R. Sill, when he wrote for us all:

"Fret not that thy day is gone,
And the task is still undone.
'Twas not thine, it seems, at all:
Near to thee it chanced to fall,
Close enough to stir thy brain,
And to vex thy heart in vain.

"Somewhere in a nook forlorn,
Yesterday a babe was born:
He shall do thy waiting task;
All thy questions he shall ask,
And the answers will be given,
Whispered lightly out of heaven.

"His shall be no stumbling feet,
Falling when they should be fleet;
He shall hold no broken clew;
Friends shall unto him be true;
Men shall love him; falsehood's aim
Shall not shatter his good name.

"Day shall nerve his arm with light,
Slumber soothe him all the night;
Summer's peace and winter's storm
Help him all his will perform.
'Tis enough of joy for thee
His high service to foresee."

And "here is the patience and the faith of the saints." In doing all the good that one has a right to do, one must trustfully refuse to do the good which it belongs to some one else to do.

XVI.

THE DUTY OF STRIVING TO RENDER ONE'S SELF USELESS.

There is a world of satisfaction in feeling that one is useful; that one is of important service in his sphere; that one is doing that which needs to be done, and which he alone, or which he pre-eminently, is fitted to do. It is a dreary state for one to be in, when he feels that he is useless; that he can do no service in any sphere; that he has no immediate mission of good to any human being. Most trying of all is it, for one who has been useful, who has been of real service in the world, to find himself no longer needed, no longer a necessity to those about him; forced to cry with Milton's Samson:

"Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonored, quelled,
To what can I be useful?"

Yet, as a practical matter, there are few spheres, if any, in human life, where it is not one's duty to strive faithfully and in tirelessness to render one's self useless; where, indeed, one's immediate usefulness is not to be measured by his capacity for rendering himself useless. Does that statement seem questionable? If it does, just look at the facts in the case.

If there is a sudden leak in your house-roof during a driving storm, and the rain is endangering your ceilings and carpets in the rooms nearest the roof, you will, perhaps, send word to a carpenter, or tinner, or roofer, asking his help in the emergency. When he comes, there are two ways possible to him. He can go out on the roof with an assistant, and cover the leak with an oil-cloth or a sheet of tin, which he and his helper hold in place there. That will make him a "useful" man as long as the storm lasts—which may be several days and nights; and he could make himself useful again in that same way at every recurrence of a storm.

On the other hand, that roofer can, with or without an assistant, repair that roof in an hour's time, so that it is as sound as ever, and his services are no longer needed there. That makes the roof useful, and the roofer useless. The latter has done his duty, by striving to render himself useless; and he has proved more useful than if he had striven to be "useful" unceasingly. And as it is in this minor matter, so it is all the way up in the scale of right endeavor.

Prolonging a piece of work for another is a method of proving the worker's indispensable usefulness to his employer. Finishing up a piece of work to which one is set, renders the worker immediately useless in that sphere. Yet who can doubt that the effort to render one's self useless in this way is more commendable than the effort to prove one's usefulness in the other way?

A quaint old New-Englander said, that he could tell by the sound of the carpenters' hammers, as he was passing a new house in process of building, whether the men were at

work "by the day" or "by the job;" whether they were paid a stated price for each day's work, or were paid a given amount for the entire undertaking. In the one case, he said, the hammer strokes came leisurely, and with convenient spaces between them, as if they would say: "By—the—day,—By—the—day,—By—the—day." In the other case they came thick and fast: "Bythejob. Bythejob. Bythejob." In one case the carpenters were determined to prove themselves useful—one day at a time. In the other case, they were striving to prove themselves useless there—by finishing that piece of work, in order to take hold of another piece of work elsewhere.

There are ever two ways of striving to fill one's place in the world: one is, by seeking to prove one's self useful; the other, by striving to render one's self useless. The first way is the commoner and the more attractive; the second is the rarer and the more noble. Whatever might seem to be the comparative effect of these two methods on the

personal interests of the individual worker, there can hardly be a question that the latter method is the better one for the work undertaken, and for the involved interests of those for whom the work is attempted. Whatever self-interest might seem to prompt, duty clearly calls to the latter course.

Take, for another example, the mission of one's family physician. His usefulness is shown in the time of sickness. So far as that family is concerned, he is useless when the health of each member of the household is such that there is no need of his services there. But when he is called in attendance at that family, his plain duty is to strive to render himself useless as quickly as possible. If he would prolong his apparent usefulness, and increase his fees accordingly, he might seek to keep his patient in a state of ill-health; but acting under a sense of duty, and out of regard to the welfare of his patient, he strives to hasten his patient's recovery, even though he thereby renders himself useless. It is said that the Chinese, in their

treatment of physicians, recognize the natural unwillingness of human nature to render itself useless, when usefulness settles the measure of reward. The emperor pays a regular salary to his physicians as long as he is well; but as soon as he is sick their pay ceases, and it is not resumed again until he is fully restored to health. Under these conditions the Chinese court-physicians are likely to strive to render themselves useless; for they receive no pay unless they are useless. Our Christian physicians need no such treatment as this to induce them to strive to render themselves useless in every family which they attend; but the illustration is a good one as indicating our common duty of striving in this direction.

It is peculiarly the mission of a teacher to strive to render himself useless, as a teacher, to the scholars of his charge. When first he takes them in hand, they have need of him at every step. His ability in the line of his mission is, however, practically to be measured by his success in rendering him-

self useless. A poor teacher wants to remain useful to his scholars, or acts as if he wanted to. He continues to help his scholars all the way along in their work; or he continues to do his scholars' work for them, instead of showing the scholars how to do their own work. A good teacher, on the contrary, strives to put his scholars beyond the need of a teacher's help, so that the teacher will be as useless to the scholars as are the swaddling-clothes of a babe to a full-grown youth.

The Apostle Paul uses this figure of a truly successful teacher, when he suggests that the symbolic ritual law of Moses is useless to the Christian disciple, even though it once had great usefulness. "The law was our schoolmaster [or tutor, or pedagogue] to bring us unto Christ, [very useful up to that point,] that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. [The law is now useless, through the fulfilling of its purpose.]" So of every other schoolmaster.

He is a success only through coming to be useless.

Parents have a special duty, and parents have a special temptation, at this very point. Parents are very useful to their young children. Parents enjoy being thus useful. But it is the duty of parents to strive to render themselves useless, in one thing after another, *as parents;* and, in spite of their enjoyment of being useful to their children, it is their duty to strive to render themselves useless, as parents, in all things. They ought to become useless, in carrying their children, in dressing their children, in cutting up their children's food, in putting words of speech or of prayer into their children's mouths; and so on, step by step, toward the manhood and the womanhood of their children. It is a perverted sentiment, it is a failure in duty, which prompts parents to prolong their immediate usefulness to their children, by keeping those children dependent on them beyond the proper period of filial dependency. It is a sad sight to see a son, of the years of

manhood, and in full vigor of life, still a child in his dependence on his father's care; or to see a daughter in full health, and of woman's age, still a child in dependence on her mother's ministry. It is to the parent's shame, when a parent of a proper child can say, "My child, although at the years of maturity, is as truly dependent on me for parental care and counsel as ever." Such a parent is so far a failure, as a parent.

The father who is a success as a father will have rendered himself useless as a father to his son,—in matters of control and direction, although not in matters of sympathy and affection—by the time that that son has reached the years of full manhood; and so it will be with the successful mother and her daughter. A son or a daughter wisely trained to maturity, ought to be capable, not only of acting independently of his or her parents in matters of conscience and judgment, but of giving suggestions and help to those parents from the new stand-point of a later generation than that of the parents. And children

thus trained are all the more tender and loving and grateful toward their parents, because those parents have done their duty in being most useful by striving successfully to render themselves useless in the purely parental sphere.

A man who founds a new business, or who is at the head of an extensive mercantile establishment, of a large manufacturing concern, of a banking-house, of an insurance company, or of any other important undertaking, has before him a choice of two ways. He can retain as much of the business as is possible in his own hands, thereby rendering himself not only useful, but indispensable, in the entire conduct and management of the enterprise; or, on the other hand, he can set himself to the arranging of the business in systematized departments, and to the training of men for the oversight and charge of each of these departments—including personal assistants and skilled co-directors—so that his immediate personal activities become less and less essential to the progress of the under-

taking; until, in a sense, he seems no longer a necessity there. In the one case, the man makes himself so useful that his death would prove disastrous to the business as a whole. In the other case, he has so skilfully striven to render himself useless, as a controlling and indispensable head, that his death would prove no more of a blow to the enterprise than the death of any other one man of prominence in its directing. In the one case, his work lives after him; in the other, it dies with him. Who can doubt which of these methods is the superior one?

Success and failure are similarly shown, in the pursuance of the one or the other of these two methods, in editorial work, in the pastorate, in the superintendence of a Sunday-school, and in wellnigh every other sphere of intellectual or moral activity. A man has a right to stamp his personality on his work in any one of these spheres; but his endeavor should be so to impress that personality on the very organization which he oversees and directs, that his personal pres-

ence and activities in that organization shall no longer be necessary to the manifestation of his personality in its every department.

This phase of duty is not wholly a pleasant one to contemplate; but it is none the less a phase of real duty for all that. It is so delightful to realize that we are useful, that we are needful, that we are indispensable, in our spheres of labor. It is so hard to recognize the fact that we no longer are a necessity to others, that our once so important activities can now be dispensed with, that we have become useless where formerly we alone could fill the place and do its work. But in spite of its trials, the duty of striving to this very end is imperative. The parent ought to become useless to his children as a parent, the teacher to his scholars, the physician to his patient, the pastor to his people, the founder of a business to the conduct of that business, the editor to his paper's existence, the ship's captain to the voyage of his passengers. And he is most useful, he best does his work, who strives most successfully

to render himself useless—by the completion of his work.

It is to be borne in mind that the duty here urged is that of rendering one's self useless by the finishing of one's work; not that of proving one's self useless in the doing, or in the shirking, of one's work. There was a time when the Apostle Paul felt that he was so useful to the early Church that he must not cease his labors, however toilsome and trying they might be to him. "I am in a strait betwixt the two," he said, "having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide." But Paul strove to finish his work so that he should no longer be needful to others; and there came a time when he could say trustfully: "The time of my departure is come. . . . I have finished the course." And he was then ready to count himself useless here, because his work here was accomplished.

Ay, and there was a time when our blessed

Lord himself could count his labors no longer needed here, when he could look upon himself, as at last useless, in the flesh, to his loved disciples on earth. They deemed his presence with them as useful beyond all measure, and their hearts were filled with sorrow at the thought of his going away from them. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth," he said to them; "It is expedient for you that I go away." And to his Father he said, of the reason for his going away: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And when he could say of his earthly mission, "It is finished," he "bowed his head, and gave up his spirit." In this light of duty, it is a blessed thing to become useless through having been useful until usefulness is no longer a necessity in one's sphere.

XVII.

THE INEXCUSABLENESS OF EXCUSES.

There is positively no excuse for making excuses—excuses for doing wrong or for failing to do right. A defense of one's course as absolutely correct is one thing. A confession of one's course as absolutely indefensible is another thing. Either of these methods is well in its place. But an excuse for one's course as wrong, but not blameworthy, is never wise, never expedient, never commendable. Yet it is one of the rarest things in the world for a person frankly to confess to error, or squarely to refuse to do a plain duty, without proffering an excuse. In bringing himself to trial, a man's verdict is likely to be either "Guilty, but served him right," or "Not guilty, but mustn't do so again."

Excusing another's faults or failures is a very different matter from seeking an excuse for one's own. True charity prompts us to look for a probable or possible excuse for others. True self-respect prompts us to admit unequivocally that there is no excuse for our not conforming to the highest standard attainable. "The real man is one who always finds excuses for others, but never excuses himself." There is, in fact, hardly any truer test of high manhood or of high womanhood than the uniform refraining from making excuses. Yet there are multitudes of intelligent and well-disposed persons who think that the framing of an excuse when they are delinquent or reluctant is a necessity; that somehow it puts them in a better light than if they said unhesitatingly, "I am at fault," or, "I am not willing to do right."

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse," says Jesus concerning the persons of whom he told in a parable. The practice so common in that day is a practice

of all ages. "He that does amiss never lacks excuses," and "Any excuse will serve when one has not a mind to do a thing," are Italian proverbs. "He is a bad shot who cannot find an excuse," say the Germans. "A bad workman always complains of his tools," is the English putting of it. An Oriental story is told of a man going to his neighbor to borrow a rope, and receiving the answer that it was needed that day to tie up a heap of sand. "To tie up sand!" said the would-be borrower; "I don't see how you can tie sand with a rope." "Ah!" said the other, "you can do almost anything with a rope when you don't want to lend it."

The habit of making excuses is pretty sure to lead one to some such folly in their framing as is illustrated by this story of the Orientals. Inasmuch as no excuse for wrong-doing can ever justify the wrong, and no excuse for failing to perform a positive duty can ever justify that failure, every excuse will inevitably fall below its aim, and so bring its framer into ridicule or contempt, whether the excuse be

true or, as is often the case, be an ingenious and perhaps unconscious lie.

Many years ago, before the days of steamboats and railroads, the common mode of communication between a small seaport in Connecticut and New York City was a packet-sloop, which made trips to and fro across the sound as often as favoring winds would allow. The captain of that vessel was the express messenger by whom the villagers did most of their city shopping. On one occasion a merchant of the village handed the captain a doubtful-looking five-dollar note on the old Merchants' Bank, with a request that on his next trip he would go to the bank and learn if the note was a good one. If it was genuine, he was to obtain a fresh one in its exchange. If it was a counterfeit, it would be so marked by the bank.

The captain promised to attend to the commission, but thought nothing more of the matter until he had returned to the village from New York, and was asked by the merchant as to the result of his inquiry. As he

was an inveterate excuse-maker, he was, of course, not ready to admit that he had forgotten a commission. Taking out his wallet, therefore, he handed back the identical note to its owner. "But how is this?" asked the merchant; "I asked you to get a fresh note if this were genuine, and have it stamped as counterfeit if it were not." "I know all that," said the plausible captain. "I told the bank man just what you said; but he wasn't ready to do either thing. He eyed that bill on both sides, and then he said to me, says he, 'Captain, that bill is a sort of half and half. It ain't good enough to give a new one for, but it's too good to cross. It's a middling good bill—neither one thing nor t'other. You'd better take that back again.' So there it is for you."

From that day to this there is a saying in that village that a thing which is of doubtful value is "like Captain Daniel's bill, neither one thing nor the other." And that old captain's excuse was about as good as the average excuse which is proffered for a failure in

well-doing at home, in school, in the office, the store, the mill, or on the farm. Ingenuity in excuse-making is not good sense in excuse-making. No practice in the business can save one from making a fool of himself in that business.

A justifying reason for inability to do what would otherwise have been done, is a very different thing from an excuse for not doing what was not impossible. It is excuses,—offered in palliation or extenuation of a fault or a failure,—not justifying reasons for action or non-action, that are inexcusable. Ladies rarely give a reason for postponing social calls on their acquaintances; but they abound in excuses. Absence from town or prolonged sickness would be a reason for not making a call. The pressure of varied duties is an uncomplimentary excuse for neglecting an acquaintance or a friend.

If a man had promised his wife, as he left his house in the morning, to call and make a purchase for her at a certain store, during the day, and now he is back at his home without

bringing what she had asked for, the question comes properly, Is there any *reason* for his failure? but not, Is there any plausible *excuse?* If he can say, "I found that that store was burned down last night;" or, "I called at the store, but could not find what you asked for," he has given a sufficient *reason* for his failure to bring what was wanted. But if he simply forgot the commission, or kept putting it off until it was too late to attend to it, there is no better way for him than to own up frankly to that fact, and ask forgiveness accordingly.

Any *excuse* that such a man may proffer to his wife about the pressure of his business cares, or the attractiveness of a conversation he was in as he passed the store, only makes the matter worse. It shows that his wife's wishes and his own word had a minor place in his thoughts, and that he deems it not strange that this should have been the case. So it is, all the way through, with this business of excuse-making. The fault or the failure is bad enough. There is no use in making

it worse by showing how little reason there is for its existence.

"And, oftentimes, excusing of a fault
Doth make the fault the worse by the excuse."

Between husband and wife, or friend and friend, or teacher and pupil, or principal and agent, there is no call for any suspicion of intentional wrong-doing or neglect. It is taken for granted by each that the other intended well, meant to be faithful, wanted to do right. Why, then, is there a call for an excuse to prove what is already understood? A frank and unqualified admission of blame throws the one at fault on the magnanimity, or generosity, or charity, or considerateness, or affection, of the other. It is impossible for one to be in better shape than just there. But the moment an excuse is proffered, a new issue is raised. The question then is, whether that excuse ought to be accepted as a palliation of the offense, or whether it is an aggravation of it. The original question, whether the one at fault was to be heartily forgiven, is necessarily lost sight of.

Those who really love us, or who really trust us, will ordinarily find a great deal better excuses for our shortcomings or transgressions than we can frame for ourselves, if we will confidently leave our case in their hands. No trouble would come from our misdoing or our lack, if only we would refrain from the inexcusable attempting of excuses.

If it is inexcusable to make excuses to our fellow-men, how inexcusable it is to attempt to deceive the Lord, or to better ourselves in his sight, by the proffer of excuses for our misdoing or our omissions in duty. It only makes the matter worse for us to say, that we are unready to do our duty toward God because some one else is hypocritical in his claim of well-doing, or that we are kept back from the open service of God by our dislike of the creeds of this or that church or denomination.

If, indeed, we think that we have done the best we could do, and that we are now ready to do better should the way be opened and the light be given, let us appeal confidently to

God's knowledge of this fact. But if we see that we have not come up to God's requirements of us, our hope is not in excuses, but in confession. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves [but we do not deceive God], and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

XVIII.

CHANGING THE PAST.

There is no sadder truth to the human mind than the irrevocableness of the past. The future can by God's blessing be influenced; but the past is fixed forever. That is the feeling of even those who believe that "with God all things are possible,"—all things for the *future*, that is; for how can God himself change that which is no longer before us, or before him, to be changed? This truth it is which makes the past so gloomy in the minds of those who realize how much better it might have been, or who dwell upon the brightness and the hope that it carried away with it, or that it destroyed utterly.

Good Hezekiah gave expression to the wellnigh universal feeling on this subject, when he chose the sign which should assure him that God would answer his prayer for a

longer life. "Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?" asked the prophet, of the king. And Hezekiah answered, "It is a light thing for the shadow to decline ten steps: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten steps."

All of us would agree with Hezekiah on this point. All of us can see that the future is as open and uncertain as the past is closed and sure. Anything may happen in the future. There are no surprises which *may* not be in store for us. Life or death, suffering or joy, disappointment or prosperity unprecedented, overflowing love or utter loneliness,—we know that to-morrow may bring these to us beyond our strongest fears or our brightest hopes. "It is a light thing" for *any* change to come to us in the future. Not so, however, with the past. What has been is, and ever must be. No hope of change is *there.*

> "Not heaven itself upon the past has power;
> But what has been, has been, and I have had
> my hour."

There are both natural and moral impossi-

bilities in the realm of God's doings. That which cannot be, even God is unable to make. That is our way of looking at it. But what is the record in the case of Hezekiah?

"And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he [the Lord] brought the shadow ten steps backward, by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz." So God *did* change the past, did turn back the dial of time, did enable his servant to live a portion of his life over again. And what God has done once, God can do again. There is a sense in which God changes the past to every child of his who asks such a change in need and in faith. God's prophecies and promises to his people of old are to his people of to-day. "Hear this, ye old men," he says, "and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath

the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpiller eaten."

Most of us think that a touch of that prophecy has been felt in our experience at one time or another in the bitterly remembered past. But how about the promise which follows it? "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain in just measure, and he causeth to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain, in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And *I will restore to you the years* that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

What a promise that to the sad-hearted

child of God who counts the past of his sorrow and trial irrevocable! And that promise is God's promise. It is the promise of one who never promised what he cannot perform, who never promised what he is not ready to make good. The sun *can* go back on the dial. The past *can* be changed.

How much to us is involved in this thought! How large a share of our anxiety, of our regrets, and of our longings, rests on the past! If only the past could come back to us! If only we could live our child-life over again! If only we could once more have those joys of our maturer years, in that home which was, but no longer is! If only we could share again the inspiration and the sympathy of that companionship which ended in the long-gone years!

> "But the tender grace of a day that is dead
> Will never come back to me."

And oh for the power to change the words and the deeds of the long ago! If only we could undo that one hour's sad doing! If only we could unsay that one bitter or that

one thoughtless and foolish word! If only in the light of the present we could have now the privilege of that choice which we treated so lightly as it came and went—once for all! But no; it is too late for this. And what a gloom is on our present and our future at their best, in consequence.

> "The past rolls forward on the sun
> And makes all night. O dreams begun,
> Not to be ended! Ended bliss!
> And life, that will not end in this!
> My days go on; my days go on."

It is while we are thus gloomy or despondent over the past with its losses and its mistakes, and while we sit shivering in the chill of its shadow, and in the dread of its further consequences, that the word of our God comes to us reprovingly and assuringly, "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now shall it spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert." The past and the future are alike in the hands of

God: and to God *all* things are possible." Even that which has been is no longer beyond his control. He can change the past as truly as he can shape the future.

But, how can God change the past? How can that which already is, be as if it never had been? These questions are not so easy of answer. As with many another truth, we are here called of God to accept his promise as sure, without seeing just *how* he can make it good. Indeed, most of the promises of God are paradoxical; but that makes their fulfillment none the less real and precious to us. And concerning the past, in our own experiences, or in the experiences of others, have we never known it changed through new light, or through the operation of new influences? Has it never been found that that which caused our hearts to sink, as a great disaster, was a source of subsequent comfort to us? that that which was called failure became a triumph? that an apparent loss was an actual gain? that a bitter disappointment was finally rejoiced over?

There have been times of misunderstanding with dear ones, when our hearts cried out," Now, surely, all hope is gone. Nothing can change *this*. Love, faith, friendship—all are in the past." Yet a few words of explanation, or a few days or weeks of patient waiting, and the dark cloud was first gilded and then floated away in light, and the sky was clear from horizon to zenith, behind, before, and on either hand. The past was changed. Its dread realities were no longer real. All of us have had experiences like this. We cannot have forgotten them. And shall not that which has happened to us once and again be possible to us in the future?

This, however, you say, is not an actual change of the past, but only a change of our estimate of it, or of our relations to its experiences. Well, call it what you will, it is that which makes God's promise good to us, and that makes our joy complete. The past which now seems gloomy may glow with radiance. The loss which now seems irreparable may prove a gain unspeakable. The

mistakes and the follies and the disappointments of the years which are gone may be seen, in the light of God's grace, to be of the "all things" which "work together for good" "to them that love God." If the change in our past is to be wrought of God through a change in ourselves, let us have none the less hope of it, none the less rejoicing in it. Let us look up to God trustfully, and say concerning the past as well as the future or the present:

> "For us,—whatever's undergone
> Thou knowest; willest what is done.
> Grief may be joy misunderstood,
> Only the good discerns the good."

The child of God has no right to worry or to grieve over any past as irrevocable. Any sorrow, any loss, any folly, any shame, which burdens our memory, can be cast confidently on Him who is ready to bear our every burden, and who, as he takes it from us, says cheeringly: "Behold, I make *all things* new." The hope which is buried from our human

eyes is not hidden from God's sight. To him it is never a lost hope—or a forgotten one.

"And in the hereafter, angels may
Roll the stone from its grave away."

XIX.

THE SAFETY OF DANGER.

Almost any one can see the dangerousness of danger, but the safety of danger is not so apparent. Yet there is a sense in which our truest safety is in our constant danger; a sense in which it may be said that our protection from danger is through the very presence of danger. And this practical paradox has its important bearing on our every-day life in the world, and on the life beyond.

The added *peril* which comes through peril and the consciousness of peril, is illustrated in the fact that it is by no means so easy to walk a narrow ledge on the brink of a lofty precipice, or to cross a yawning abyss on a single girder, as it would be to tread surely within similar limits on a parlor carpet, or on a firm flagged-pavement. So, again, it is shown in the fact that when the greatest stake

is involved in a steady hand or in a clear head, in some important trial of strength or skill, the very largeness of the danger of failure will often unsteady the hand or confuse the brain, which would otherwise be competent to the task of the moment without a question. This coarser side of the paradox is more readily seen, but it is not surer, than the other side. The added *safety* which comes through the recognized existence of danger is as real and as prevailing as the added danger through the same existence and recognition.

It is the constant danger of explosion in a powder mill or magazine which secures the comparative safety of that focal center of explosives. It is the special danger of fire that gives special immunity from burning to many a mill or warehouse or dwelling which is stored with combustibles. It is the ever-imminent danger of dealing out death by a careless hand that makes the druggist's eye so watchful, and his ordinary ministerings so trustworthy. It is the multiplied and never intermitted dangers of the helpless babe that

secures its safety in the ceaseless oversight of its loving and consciously responsible mother. It is the fact that danger lurks in every passing breeze, in every article of food or drink, and at every unguarded footstep of life's journey, that prompts the added attention to diet and dress, and to cleanliness and ventilation and exercise, which in itself is measurable safety from the danger which has demanded this attention.

It is the public danger of epidemic and conflagration and crime and disorder, in our more crowded cities, that organizes the entire community for sanitary and police protections, and that ensures safety to the rich and the poor alike; the common safety being a result of the common danger. It is because there is new danger at every new second on the rushing train, or on the steamer off a foggy coast, that causes the faithful engine-driver, or the trusty pilot, never to turn his look or thought from his duty of securing the safety of those committed to his charge. And so at every point in the realm of physical perils.

It is in and through the very danger of the hour that the safety of the hour is secured.

In the mental sphere, also, it is much the same as in the physical. It is the danger of misunderstanding what is spoken or written that quickens the ear and the eye of him who would learn, and that carries him safely past the perils which he fears. It is because of his danger of not being understood in what he is saying, that makes a man choose his words so carefully as to make him safe in the consciousness that no one can misunderstand him now. It is because of the danger of forgetting what he has read or heard, that a man seeks and finds safety in fixing in his memory that which he feels he must not let slip. It is because of the danger of his falling behind his fellows in knowledge and in intellectual power, and of the practical consequences to himself of his remaining in mental ignorance, that he toils and struggles in his outreaching after mental acquisitions, until he is safe against being a drone or a laggard in the field of letters. It is, in fact, the practical danger of

leaving truth undisclosed, in the fields of thought, of science, and of art, that prompts to intellectual activity generally, and that thereby secures the aggregate results of study and research all the world over. If it were not for the dangers in the realm of the mind-powers, there would be far less of safety there.

But it is in the moral sphere pre-eminently that the safety of danger is manifest, and that for ourselves and for others there is safety in proportion to the danger which is imminent. It is true that the simple demand of duty, and the innate promptings of right, *ought to be* sufficient to make every man faithful and unswerving in the loving service of his God, and in a loving regard for the welfare and needs of his fellow-men; but it is also true that this demand and this prompting *are not* sufficient to this end. Were it not for the danger of wrong-doing in this world, there would be far less of safety through well-doing in this world.

Even with the most loving and tender heart, and in the largest and most generous soul, here in this world as it is, it is the dan-

ger which confronts one in wrong-doing that operates to secure safety from wrong-doing and its results. What if a child found there was no danger of grieving his mother, or of paining his playmate, or of making himself unhappy, by any act of selfishness or ill-nature, or by any word or look of unkindness or of discontent? Would he be safe against selfishness, unkindness, discontent, and ill-nature? Is not his safety here dependent on the danger which is before him? What if a husband and father knew there was no danger of his failing to make his home a happy one, through his over-attention to his outside business, or through his inattention to thoughtful and self-forgetting ministries to wife and children in that home? Could he be as safe, in that sphere, as a sense of the danger which he is watchful to avoid now makes him? What if the best of friends were never in danger of inconsiderate looks, or speech, or conduct, in their ordinary intercourse of friendship? Could they have that habit of gentle, tender, winsome, and impressive considerateness, in their

mutual bearing toward each other, which is now their safety in and through all dangers? Ah! it is the peril of failure that gives safety from that peril to the most loving and gracious heart.

But it is not merely in the loving heart, it is also in the weak and erring human heart, that the safety of the hour largely rests in the danger of the hour. A godly and venerable Christian bishop has spoken, in a sermon, of the steadying influence on himself of the consciousness that he is always under the eyes of those who know him and observe him, in the community where he lives. "I never step out of my house in that city," he says, "I never pass along any street more public or retired, I am never anywhere, without being likely to be seen by some one who knows me. And a knowledge of this fact makes me always watchful of myself, and cautious. I want it to be so that whoever sees me, at any time or anywhere, will be able to see nothing in me that is inconsistent with the character of a loyal and faithful

servant of Christ." Would that Christian bishop have this constant sense of personal responsibility in his representative character before others, if there were no danger of inconsistency between his conduct and his professions? Is he not, in fact, all the safer because of being always in danger? And is that Christian bishop alone in this safety of moral rectitude through this danger of moral deflection?

Is it not true that we, each and all, are held back from wrong-doing every day, if not every hour, of our lives, by the danger which faces us if we turn aside or go astray? What if we could follow every sinful impulse of our hearts without any personal danger to ourselves or to our loved ones? What if we could go just where we pleased, and do just what we pleased, with perfect immunity from evil consequences to ourselves or to others? What, indeed, if we alone were to be involved in the results of our wrong-doing? What if there were no danger of our breaking the hearts of others, of our wrecking a happy home, of our dishonoring a noble name, of

our bringing into disgrace the cause which we are most closely linked with, by our moral deflection? Could we be sure of the safety which is now ours in tremulous confidence, if the danger before which we tremble were less real or less terrible? No, it is in our danger that our safety lies. It is only as we think we may fall that we are enabled to stand.

Nor need we be humiliated, even though we be humbled, in the knowledge that we should not be safe if it were not for our danger. It is better for us to find safety in danger, than for us to be without that safety which is possible only through danger;

> "Better to be driven
> By adverse winds upon the coast of Heaven;
> Better to be,
> As it were, shipwrecked upon its rocks
> By fiercest shocks,
> Than to sail across a waveless sea
> Into a Christless immortality."

And both this life and the life to come will have largest blessing in and through the safety of danger in the life that now is.

God knew us in our possibilities, as well as in our needs, when he gave equal prominence to the danger which confronts the human soul in the way of evil, and to the safety which is provided for that soul in the way of good. And not only does God supply added help to those who realize their danger, and who would find in it an impulse to safety, but he has so ordered the course of events as to make the highest attainment in character and in capacity to be dependent on the presence of danger, and on the finding of safety in and through that danger. Only to those who are in danger is safety from danger assured. Only out of danger is salvation itself a possibility. And alike the noble bearing of the soldier and the heavenly expression of the saint are a consequence of danger faced and of danger triumphed over, and are the inspired and the inspiring witness to the safety of danger, through faith.

XX.

LIVING IS DYING.

A Christian business man, who was yet in the prime of life, and who had seemed, indeed, to be the very personification of vigorous and bounding health, was taken with annoying and distressing symptoms of disease, which did not yield to treatment, as he and his skilled physician had anticipated. After a time his physician expressed a wish for consultation with eminent medical practitioners, and a council to consider the case was held accordingly. The result of that consultation was a conviction on the part of the physicians that their patient was already death-smitten; that an internal tumor had even now made such progress in its mastery over all his vital forces as to forbid hope of his prolonged life,—even in case, as it was suggested, the tumor itself were to be re-

moved by a miracle; that, in fact, the strong man, who had hope of long years of life, was at that moment, all unconsciously to himself, a dying man; and that now there was nothing left for him to do but to face death, and to prepare for it.

This sad conclusion of the physicians was yet to be made known to the unsuspecting patient; and, at the request of the heart-bursting wife, a friend of the husband essayed its communication to him. Already the languor of death was slowly creeping over the man, who had no thought of dying; but he was cheerful and sanguine. After a few general words about the state of health of the sick man, the friend asked the question directly: "If you knew that you were not to recover from this illness, is there any business matter that you would like to attend to, or any parting word that you would like to speak to others?" "Why, of course, there are a good many things that I should like to attend to in such a case," was the natural answer to this. "Well, from what your phy-

sician tells me," said the friend, "I think you would better attend to those things at once." "Perhaps that would be the course of prudence," was the still unsuspicious response. "It is more than a matter of prudence; it is a matter of necessity," pressed the friend seriously. "If you really think so, I will sit up and talk over my business affairs after I have had a little nap," said the sick man. "My friend," responded the bearer of the sad message, "you mustn't take another nap, nor wait another hour, before attending to your last duties here." And he added seriously, and in measured tones, "I mean just what I say; for I speak at the request of your physician, and he assures me that what you would do here you must do very quickly." "I understand you now," was then the earnest and untremulous response of the surprised, but not unready, man,—"I understand you now. You mean that I am already dying. I understand it now, and it does not disturb me. I will rouse right up, and look after matters that need my attention."

Then began the busy preparations of the now consciously dying man. He was a bank president, a railroad president, a Sunday-school superintendent. He had large and varied interests in other directions also. There was much to be done, and a brief time for its doing. Calmly and seriously, but in cheerfulness and without a show of anxiety, he gave directions concerning the disposition of his worldly affairs. Then he called his loved ones about him, and talked with them in cheery tenderness. And so his dying hours were passed. His room was a place of brightness to the end of his earthly course. The fact that he was dying, and that he knew that he was dying, only gave new seriousness and new efficiency to his living while he still was living. So far, that Christian business man was an example in his living and in his dying.

It is always a solemn moment when a man is told that he is dying. And the solemn moment when a man *might* be told truly that he is dying, is always *now* to any living man;

for, in the truest and most literal sense, living is always dying. No sooner does a man begin to live than he begins to die. From the first hour of his life to its last hour he is dying surely and steadily, and it is "only a question of time" when his dying shall be completed. It is not in the thought of the modern poet alone, that

> "Our hearts, though stout and brave,
> Still, like muffled drums, are beating
> Funeral marches to the grave."

It was wellnigh thirty centuries ago that the inspired poet-king of Israel declared, in the hour of his vigorous young manhood, "There is but a step between me and death." A thousand years later, Seneca the wise affirmed: "Daily we die; for daily some portion of our life is taken from us;" and was it an echo of these words of Seneca when Paul the apostle said of his ceaseless life-struggle in Christ, "I die daily"?

Yet four centuries after Paul, but still more than fourteen centuries ago, Augustine, the

Christian Father, expanded this thought more fully and explicitly. "No sooner do we begin to live in this dying body," he said, "than we begin to move ceaselessly towards death. . . . Certainly there is no one who is not nearer it this year than last year, and to-morrow than to-day, and to-day than yesterday, and a short while hence than now, and now than a short while ago. For whatever time we live is deducted from our whole term of life, and that which remains is daily becoming less and less; so that our whole life is nothing but a race towards death, in which no one is allowed to stand still for a little space, or to go somewhat more slowly, but all are driven forward with an impartial movement, and with equal rapidity. . . . Further, if every man begins to die, that is, is in death [is actually dying], as soon as death begins to show itself in him (by taking away life, to wit; for when life is all taken away, the man will be then not *in* death, but *after* death), then he begins to die so soon as he begins to live." Or, as good Bishop Hall has phrased

it: "Death borders upon our birth, and our cradle stands in our grave."

If, indeed, it be known that a man is possessed by a disease that must have a fatal termination, it is customary to say of him, "Poor man, it is only a question of *time* in his case." Such a man is recognized as dying while he is living. But with what man is it more than a mere question of time—as to his dying? What man is not at his very birth possessed of a physical nature that has in it the seeds of decay, of dissolution, of death? What man is there of whom it may not be said at all times, in sober strictness of truth, "Poor man, it is only a question of time in his case"? Every living man is a dying man, dying while living, dying because living. He who fails to face this truth as a truth, fails of recognizing his position as it is with its involvings of personal responsibility and of personal duty.

There are three ways in which to look at this very practical paradox, that living is dying; and our highest interests for now and for hereafter are involved in the choice which

we make between these three ways. Men may seek to forget or to ignore the fact that they are dying. They may feast and jest, and may die feasting and jesting. Or, again, men may stand appalled and terror-stricken at the thought that they are dying; and they may refuse to use wisely or cheerfully the life that is passing away, just because it is passing away. In the one case, their living is made worthless by their unmanly trifling. In the other case, their living is rendered useless by their unmanly shrinking. In both cases, their living and their dying is for nought. Yet again, however, men may face with serious fearlessness the fact that they are dying, and may use their every dying moment wisely and to the best advantage. They may live, while they live, as those who know they are dying, and are making ready to die; and they may die, when they die, as those who were living to the very latest moment of life. Can there be any doubt as to which of these three ways is the proper way for a Christian believer?

What added vigor and what added tenderness would accrue to all the acts and words of our every living hour, if we were to bear in mind unfailingly that every hour is our dying hour! If each day we were to do just that, and only that, which is befitting a dying day, how worthily and how grandly would all our time be occupied and employed. If every word spoken to a loved one, or to a chance acquaintance, were spoken as a dying word, as a word which should be remembered pleasantly by the surviving hearer, what deeper meaning and what truer gentleness would thrill in the tones of the dying speaker! Nor would this mode of thought, and of the expression of thought, necessarily make life less cheerful, while making it more earnest. There might well be gladsomeness in one's bearing, as he seeks to impress delightful memories of himself on those whom he is never to meet again on earth, or as he seeks to improve to the highest his final opportunity of giving help and cheer to his fellow-mortal.

Living is dying; and the truest and noblest use of every living hour is to use it as one more dying hour. In such a use of every hour, while living is dying, dying is also fullest and holiest living.

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